The Historical Formation of Romantic Egotism
Sensibility, Radicalism, and the Reception of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's Early Poetry

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ABSTRACT

This is a study of selfhood in English Romanticism with reference to the reception of poetry in history. To counter the popular but exaggerated image of the Romantic as a solipsist, of socially alienated selfhood, I choose the term "egotism," which implies social relations rather than introspection or individuality. First used by Joseph Addison in English, "egotism" mainly designates failure in social tact or breach of decorum, especially when the presentation of self offends others. Qualifying Leftist studies of social alienation, I try to historicize "poetic calling" with respect to Milton, to highlight the élitist leanings in Romantic poets, and to explain why the poet's psychology, especially his or her attitudes towards the poetic vocation and the public, is more important than mere economic or political forces. Dealing with the reception of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's early poetry and situating their poetry in poetic traditions, I try to remedy the simplistic notion of a "Romantic revolt" in poetics analogous to and directly influenced by the French Revolution. Examining the reception of Wordsworth's *Poems* (1807) closely, I trace the formation of "egotism" as a stigmatizing term related to the politics of taste. Dealing with the more general attack on the "Lake School," I point out that twentieth-century Romantic scholarship is indebted to Romantic criticism, especially to

William Hazlitt, for the notions of "Romantic revolt," of "egotism," and of the simplistic and anachronistic opposition between Romanticism and a certain "neo-Classicism." I further explain how Hazlitt's portrait is tainted by his curious love-hate relations with the "Lake Poets." Through a study of reception, I wish to contribute to the issue of discourse-formations with respect to English Romanticism.

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PREFACE

The main theme of the present study is Romantic selfhood with respect to reading formations in history. In other words, I wish to study Romantic selfhood in the perspective of social relations, particularly relations between the poet and the critic. Both "Romantic" and "selfhood," of course, are not unproblematic terms. In an academic context since the 1960s, "Romanticism" and the "Romantic" already imply a canon of the "Big Six," the period extending from 1789 or 1798 to about 1830, and the leanings towards transcendence. My point of departure is the problems with "Visionary Romanticism," by which I refer to the studies by such influential Romantic scholars as Northrop Frye, M.H. Abrams, Harold Bloom and Geoffrey Hartman. There is, of course, a certain theoretical violence in grouping them under the umbrella term "Visionary Romanticism."[1] But the coinage does have the merit of highlighting some important academic consensus from the mid-1940s to the early 1970s: the over-emphasis on the "visionary" or transcendental aspect of English Romanticism and the exaggeration of socially alienated selfhood. Related to this are the firm establishment of a sextet of "visionary company," the conviction that English Romanticism

was a more or less homogeneous movement, and the "Great Divide" between "Preromanticism" and post-1789 or post-1798 "Romanticism" as a sudden, all-powerful poetic revolution or revolt analogous to and enormously influenced by the French Revolution.[1]

Ever since Visionary Romanticism, selfhood has often been understood in terms of "inwardness" and social estrangement, whether in a primarily psychoanalytic perspective about narcissism, or in a Marxist perspective as the effects of social alienation under the capitalist mode of production. Deconstruction has brought a rigorous questioning of self-presence and shifted the attention to aporias, textuality or linguistic revisionism. But the general conception of a "Romantic revolt" still remains. For Hartman, the Romantics are "clairvoyant rather than blind precursors of later movements that tended to disown them while simplifying the radical character of their art" (*Wilderness* 47). For Tilottama Rajan, "the current debate between organicist and deconstructionist critics over the nature of Romanticism was originally waged by the Romantics themselves and was not resolved in favour of either side" (*Dark Interpreter* 19). In other words, "romantic literature marks the dawning of an age of linguistic anxiety" ("Deconstruction" 317) and "is better seen as a literature involved in the restless process of self-examination, and in

search of a model of discourse which accommodates rather than simplifies its ambivalence toward the inherited equation of art with idealization" (*Dark Interpreter* 25). Instead of transcendence, we now have ambivalence, tensions and unresolved contradictions. Curiously, the decentering of the self has actually left the portrait of the Romantic as a solipsist almost unchanged. With the so-called "return of History" in the early 1980s, one would have expected a closer scrutiny of the production and reception of Romantic poetry. But the main concern in such "New Historicists" as Majorie Levinson, David Simpson and Alan Liu is textual explication, not reading formations in history. Most troubling in recent Romantic studies is the notion of "Romantic ideology," made well-known by Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology* (1983). "The scholarship and criticism of Romanticism and its work," McGann complains, "are dominated by a Romantic ideology, by an uncritical absorption in Romanticism's own self-representations" (1). Later in the 1980s Clifford Siskin and Levinson repeated more or less the same charge. The peculiar thing is, regardless of their commitment to history, they fail to see that the consolidation of the so-called "Romantic ideology" or "Romantic discourse," supposed to be at least one and a half centuries old, is mainly due to the authority of twentieth-century Romantic scholarship. In condemning the visionary

critics' and the Romantics' own "naïveté," recent Leftists only perpetuate the imprecise portrait of the English Romantic as an "ineffectual angel" (Arnold) or "a victim of romantic melancholy... incapable of action" (Babbitt 243). At moments of exaltation, as in McGann's *Romantic Ideology* or Siskin's *Historicity of Romantic Discourse* (1988), they will fiercely attack the straw man of "Romantic ideology." At moments of despair, such as can be detected in Levinson's edition *Rethinking Historicism* (1989), they will almost concede with Jerome Christensen that:

> Apostasy is the imaginative reflex or trope that constitutes modern criticism... if we deconstruct Coleridge we deconstruct a deconstruction, return to a scene where we, like that bewildered visionary, wake up embarrassed to discover ourselves apostate, having already fallen from the sunlit world of action into the treacherous moonshine of interpretation. (784)

The fluctuation between anguish and resignation, after all, dramatizes the critics' own anxiety about his or her own labour as much as about the future of academic radicalism.[3] Coleridge was not a "visionary" in the twentieth-century sense but an active journalist, public lecturer, and, as Raymond Williams discusses at length in *Culture and Society*, one of the most important early critics of capitalism. As

apostates, all the "Lake Poets" were no angels beating their wings in the void. And Shelley's poetry had inspired the Chartists and the Fabians. Byron was idolized by some Chinese revolutionaries in the early twentieth century. In none of these cases are the supposed flight from social reality and solipsism the heart of the matter. The notion of alienated selfhood depends upon a selective reading of Romantic poetry, reluctance to engage the Romantics' writings other than poetry, and indifference to the history of reception.

In a sense, my study is a cyclical journey. I begin with a critique of selfhood in Visionary Romanticism in chapter 1. Dissatisfied with the exaggerated portrayal of the Romantic as a solipsist and with the general neglect of social relations, I turn, in chapter 2, to the alternative concept of "alienation" in Leftist studies of Romanticism. Verging on economic determinism and overstating the Romantics' predicaments, the studies by Raymond Williams, Marilyn Butler, and Terry Eagleton are not very satisfactory. In arguing against them, I come up with the idea that Romantic alienation may be better explained with respect to the relations between the poet and the reading public, where the psychological dimension of the poet, especially the conception of "poetic calling" and the attitude towards the public, is more important than economic

or political backgrounds. With the emphasis on emotions and with some linguistic strategies which give the sense of natural effusions of individual sentiments, the Romantic lyric, ideally, should be a form of unalienated labour in the Marxist-Hegelian sense. Where, then, are we to locate the source of Romantic alienation? My answer is the rise of literary reviewing during the Romantic Period. Rereading Walter Jackson Bate's *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*, I suggest that public recognition, rather than mere difference "in order to secure identity" is the Romantic poets' chief concern. While agreeing that the sense of intimidation or frustration is self-imposed, I refute Bate's claim that it "is not at all historically determined and necessary" (88). In fact, it is precisely the historical conditions which shape how one may feel about one's "poetic vocation," what one can aspire to and, to some extent, how one will interact with the public. In chapter 3, therefore, I try to historicize "high poetic calling" and situate the reception of Milton in the context of the development of middle-class readership and the drive towards a national cultural identity. The importance of Milton is that he is the first English writer truly independent of clerical and aristocratic patronage and widely read and recognized as a national bard. "Literary immortality" must be understood with reference to canonization or public recognition.

Inspired by the unprecedented success of Milton, most of the Romantic poets refused to be "hacks." In the second half of chapter 3, I argue that most of the Romantics, like their Augustan predecessors, adhered to the identity of the cultural élite. In chapter 4, I deal with the nature and reception of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry in the 1790s. I point out that the early Wordsworth, in spite of his élitist leanings, was also "levelling" in his commitment to the everyday and his interest in "low and rustic life." If in the young Wordsworth there was ambivalence in literary taste, in the young Coleridge ambivalence resided more in politics than in taste. Whether exalted or melancholy, Coleridge never offended his readers because of vulgarity or excessive simplicity. Equipped with the introduction to eighteenth-century traditions of sensibility in chapter 4 and with my comments on selfhood in earlier chapters, I venture to account for the impression of Wordsworth's "egotism" with respect to contemporary reviews of his *Poems* (1807) in chapter 5. In brief, the sentiments expressed by some of his poems in the collection struck his critics as eccentric, unpoetic, absurd, pretentious or sickly, and the style was perceived to be either too low or incongruous with the content. Besides, he was seen as deliberately challenging the public taste. In the second half of the chapter, I deal with the more general attack on the "Lake

School" initiated by Francis Jeffrey of the prestigious *Edinburgh Review*. I argue that "egotism" as a label was used in a politics of taste and bore political implications. In chapter 6, I further my discussion of "egotism" with respect to William Hazlitt's love-hate relations with the "Lake Poets." Then I try to explain why Wordsworth the "egotist" was later accepted by the public and eventually became a Miltonic figure firmly canonized in English poetry. Coming finally back to the twentieth century, I point out that Visionary Romanticism is indebted to Hazlitt on three counts. The first is the notion of a "Romantic revolt" influenced by the French Revolution. Closely related to the first is the simplistic and somewhat anachronistic notion of a certain supposedly firm and conservative literary establishment, or what later critics will call "neo-Classicism," against which the Romantics revolted. The third is the notion of "egotism" in first-generation English Romantics, particularly in Wordsworth. Hazlitt's views are imprecise and tainted by some curious political and personal sentiments. Of course, in Visionary Romanticism they are transformed and "internalized," as I have discussed in chapter 1.

CHAPTER ONE

A Portrait of the Romantic as a Solipsist

The "Romantic Revolt," Lyricism and Selfhood

One prominent feature of Visionary Romanticism is a new emphasis on a post-1789 or post-1798 "poetic breakthrough" or "Romantic revolt." Critics since Northrop Frye often sharply distinguish Romanticism from "Preromanticism" or the "Age of Sensibility." Frye's "The Drunken Boat: The Revolutionary Element in Romanticism" and Abrams' "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age," both included in *Romanticism Reconsidered* (1963), are representative in this respect. Abrams rightly observes that "in many poems the Romantics do not write direct political and moral commentary" (102) but instead of explaining it in terms of poetic conventions, the general reaction against Jacobinism after 1794 and the fear of persecution, he discusses "'the politics of vision'... of the inspired prophet-priest" with surprisingly few reference to "mundane" politics. The major consequence of the French Revolution worth mentioning, for Abrams, is a psychological one: "the shattered trust in premature political revolution and the need to reconstitute the grounds of hope" (111). Severed from its specific social context, from communal experience, the so-called

"politics of vision" is "internalized" as "apocalypse of imagination" within the soul as an island entirely unto itself. In a similar vein, Frye claims that: "What I see first of all in romanticism is the effect of a profound change, not primarily in belief, but in the spatial projection of reality" (301). What he means is the inward turn, the realization of "creative power" "deep within," or, "the emphasis ... on the constructive power of the mind" (304-05). This is of course consonant with the "visionary" argument put forth in his earlier study of Blake in *Fearful Symmetry* (1947): "[Blake's] wisdom is based on the fact that imagination creates reality, and as desire is part of imagination, the world we desire is more real than the world we passively accept" (27). The "apocalypse of imagination," the rise of subjectivity, or "the internalization of quest-romance," as Bloom summarizes it, "all stem directly from English reactions to the French Revolution, or to the intellectual currents that had flowed into the Revolution" (5). The impact of the French Revolution and the "related intellectual currents" on Romantic poetry is no doubt considerable. But the emphasis on the "visionary" aspects of Romanticism represents, in the last analysis, only a highly selective perspective on Romanticism. In mystifying Romanticism as a sudden and world-changing poetic revolution based on the revolution of subjectivity, visionary critics

are vulnerable to Clifford Siskin's criticism that they tend to see "change ... without a sense of continuity" and "difference ... as creative originality" (20). A proper approach, Siskin suggests, "allows us to address both change *and* continuity, for it categorizes every text as a member both of an ongoing kind and of a synchronically distinct set of relationships among different kinds ... [that is,] variation within or innovation upon a norm" (20). Besides, in overstating the solitary poet-prophet's obsession with selfhood or imagination, the visionary critics not only overlook the more subversive Romantic works such as "A Night on Salisbury Plain" and "Peter Bell the Third," but also, more importantly, the *pragmatics* of poetic discourse, which involves the appropriation of preceding literary conventions, the relationship between different genres, the changing relationship between the poet and the public mediated by the rise of book reviewing in the nineteenth century.

In this chapter I shall engage the major visionary critics' views on selfhood. I shall develop my own ideas while assessing the strength and weakness of theirs. I pay particular attention to four famous articles of Visionary Romanticism, Bloom's "The Internalization of Quest-Romance" (1969), Hartman's "Romanticism and 'Anti-Self-Consciousness" (1968) and "Inscriptions and Romantic Nature Poetry" (1965),

and Abrams' "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric" (1965). I shall also discuss Hartman's monumental study *Wordsworth's Poetry* (1964) when appropriate.

I. From "Pensive Solitude" to "Solipsism"

The portrait of the Romantic as a solipsist was not created *ex nihilo*. A lonely meditative figure in the landscape was indeed quite popular with respect to gardening, painting and poetry long before the advent of the "New School of Poetry" represented by Wordsworth and Coleridge. "No landscape garden of the eighteenth century was complete," John Dixon Hunt reminds us, "without its hermitage or even its hermit" (1). They are symbols of solitary meditation based on "the austere regimen of the hermit fathers" and akin to the "Preromantic" tradition of retirement as exemplified by the Countess of Winchilsea's "A Nocturnal Reverie" (1713), much admired by Wordsworth. Charles Hamilton, for example, employed a hermit at a hermitage at Paine's Hill in Surrey, where, according to the contract, the hermit was required to remain for seven years,

> with a Bible, optical glasses, a mat for his feet, a hassock for his pillow, an hourglass for his timepiece, water for his beverage, and food from the house. He must wear a camel robe, and never, under any circumstances, must he cut his hair,

> beard, or nails, stray beyond the limits of Mr. Hamilton's grounds, or exchange one word with the servants. (Hunt 8)

Unfortunately, the hermit fled after three weeks. Another was employed to sit in a cave "with an hourglass in his hand, and a beard belonging to a goat" and remained for fourteen years. In addition, stuffed dummies were also used to give "the right emblematic effect at twenty yards" (8). The Augustan invocation of well-established traditions of eremiticism or pastoralism, of "the hermit fathers, myths of Arcadia and Paradise, the *beatus ille* theme, the melancholy syndrome" (6) and the soft music of *sic transit gloria mundi* aptly distinguish the more refined taste of the aristocracy or *grande bourgeoisie* from "vulgarity" in what Addison called "Mob-readers." Despite the posing, the tradition of "rural retreat" and solitary meditation fittingly served the self-elevation of the "man of Taste." When the Romantics like Wordsworth and Shelley used the solitary figure in their poetry, they were turning to an older convention. What characterizes Wordsworth's poetry is not just "pensive solitude" but the willingness to step out of the *hortus conclusus* and reach out, at least intellectually, for the low and rustic life. The theoretical violence of Visionary Romanticism is to reduce Romantic poetry into an "ego romance" of the poet, where preceding cultural and poetic

conventions are almost irrelevant, and poetic effusions are understood as "pure" lyricism, the expression of "fugitive" emotions voided of larger sociocultural meanings.

Bloom's "Internalization of Quest-Romance" is one of the best known essays in Visionary Romanticism. His thesis is simple and eloquent: Romanticism is marked by acute self-consciousness; the Romantic quest proceeds "from nature to the imagination's freedom," which "is frequently purgatorial, redemptive in direction but destructive of the social self" (6), and eventually, to the poet-hero's "own mature powers," when, having overcome Selfhood, "the triumphant Imagination" turns "outward" (17). Detached from the concrete social context, "nature" and "imagination" are like shadowy figures in Bloom's revised version of the "Freudian psychodynamics" akin to ego psychology. Radicalism is invoked by Bloom only as a prelude soon to be forgotten, marginalized from the "Real Man, the Imagination":

> Generally, Prometheus is the poet-as-hero in the first stage of his quest, marked by a deep involvement in political, social, and literary revolution, and a direct, even satirical attack on the institutional orthodoxies of European and English society, including historically oriented Christianity, and the neoclassic literary and

> intellectual tradition, particularly in its Enlightenment phase. The Real Man, the Imagination, emerges after terrible crises in the major stage of the Romantic quest, which is typified by a relative disengagement from revolutionary activism, and a standing aside from polemic and satire, so as to bring the search within the self and its ambiguities. In the Prometheus stage, the quest is allied to the libido's struggle against repressiveness, and nature is an ally, though always a wounded and sometimes a withdrawn one. In the Real Man, the Imagination stage, nature is the immediate though not the ultimate antagonist. The final enemy to be overcome is a recalcitrance in the self... [or] the Selfhood... ("Internalization" 11-12)

Bloom's "master narrative," however elegant, is strikingly limited in its scope of application, for only two of the "Big Six" are able to reach the ultimate stage of the Romantic quest. Commenting on the final phases of the quest, "the inward overcoming of the Selfhood's temptation" and the subsequent "outward turning of the triumphant Imagination, free of further internalizations" (17), Bloom has to concede that only:

> Blake and Wordsworth had long lives, and each completed his version of this dialectic. Coleridge gave up the quest, and became only an occasional poet, while Byron's quest, even had he lived into middle age, would have become increasingly ironic. Keats died at twenty-five, and Shelley at twenty-nine; despite their fecundity, they did not complete their development, but their death-fragments, *The Fall of Hyperion* and *The Triumph of Life*, prophesy the final phase of the quest in them. ("Internalization" 17)

Most troubling about Bloom's "Romantic quest" is not its limited applicability and its utter inability to accommodate what Ann Mellor calls "Romantic irony," but the ideological implications of its compelling teleological "plot." With this interpretive model, what William Hazlitt saw as the "levelling" muse in the *Lyrical Ballads*, along with Coleridge's ambivalent feelings in *Fears in Solitude*, not to say radicalism in Southey's *Joan of Arc*, Wordsworth's "Salisbury Plain," and Coleridge's Bristol lecturers, are all deemed irrelevant to the poet-hero's "own mature powers" or the "more imaginative vision." All the complicated reactions to Jacobinism and to the failure of more liberal English social reform are reduced to a melodrama of the

mind: the French Revolution is remembered only for its arousal of millennium expectations and its precipitation in mental crises to be "triumphantly" resolved; the "spirit of the age" is "internalized" as a "revolution" of subjectivity, the victory of the solitary poetic imagination. Coleridge appears merely as a flawed genius, a damaged archangel who "gave up the [Romantic] quest." His *vita activa* of public lectures, topical journalism and eloquent "table talks" is to be slighted and "unremembered." And yet how could we be so oblivious of the fact that the poet of "Limbo" and "Work Without Hope" is also an earnest Christian apologist and the "Sage of Newgate," who tried to gulp down almost all branches of contemporary knowledge?

At first sight, Hartman's notion of "anti-self-consciousness" seems to be a corrective for other visionary critics' obsessions with alienated selfhood in Romanticism. But in fact it is only a sophisticated variant. Hartman sees "the violence in France as well as the slower trauma of industrialization" as merely things that "coincided with Wordsworth's inner sense of irreparable change: they foreboded a cosmic wounding of Nature -- of natural rhythms, of organic growth -- which reinforced his fear of an apocalyptic rate of change and nature-loss" (*Wordsworth's Poetry* xvi). Again, Hartman underplays the communicative and ideological aspects of poetry, emphasizing that

"subjectivity -- even solipsism" is the heart of Romantic poetry ("Anti-Self-Consciousness" 53). The Romantic poets' "self-alienation" and "self-consciousness" are taken for granted, for "mind has its blissful islands as well as its mountains, its deeps, and treacherous crossroads" (54). Wordsworth, for Hartman, "cannot find his theme because he already has it: himself" (53).[1] In Keats, despite his "negative capability," "the 'egotistical sublime' remains" (55). The Romantic predicament is thus a mere matter of personal psychology. To save itself out of this morass, the self must interact with "that self within the self" (52), "unconsciousness," "un*self*consciousness," or "anti-self-consciousness," as it is variously labelled (55). But nature in Hartman is also the false guide. The most important conclusion drawn from his study of Wordsworth is the famous "*via naturaliter negativa*": "the brooding soul [moves] out of itself, toward nature first, then toward humanity" (55). Or, in Alan Liu's lucid summary:

> In the beginning, there is a radical of consciousness whose very condition of being is its effort to emerge as self-consciousness. Emergence involves a dialectic between "apocalypse," in which the self moves toward imaginative independence from nature, and "humanization," in which the self restores nature to primacy through

> the "myth" that nature guided mind beyond itself in the first place. The final outcome is "humanized imagination," reached by 1805 in the Simplon Pass and Snowdon episodes: a consciousness aware of self as the "borderer" subsuming both the powers of mind and nature. Such imagination may be called humanized because nature is the common medium through which mind allies itself to everyday human existence... (*Wordsworth: The Sense of History* 514)

But this "growth into self-consciousness" is never steady: "Wordsworth insisted on the creativeness of the mind and foretold its wedding to nature, yet what I saw mainly was the solipsism inherent in a great imagination, the despair tracking apocalyptic hope, the disabling shadow of ecstatic memories, and passion betrayed into compulsive empathy" (Hartman, *Wordsworth's Poetry* xvii). For textual explication of *The Prelude*, Hartman's dialectic is no doubt subtle and interesting. But his attitude towards the move "toward humanity" is quite problematic. No real disciple of "Natural Supernaturalism," Hartman is far more interested in Wordsworth's "poetics of error," the curious displacements, "the very movement of imagination's eccentric path" (xix) than the humanization of imagination, which, for Hartman, is necessarily self-deceiving. Valorizing the rare moment of

the Snowdon-consciousness, Hartman finds Wordsworth's poetry "after this peak from 1805 to the 1814 *Excursion* ... a fall because post-self-consciousness is unimaginable in the Hegelian method," Liu argues (515). Hartman's attitude towards *The Excursion* is especially ambivalent. On the one hand, he states that the poem can "offer us not a vision, but a voice" and "its failure, and to some extent its distinction, reside in that" (292). On the other hand, he confesses that "to read carefully its nine books is a massively depressing experience" (292). Finding in the poem no interesting "psychopathology of everyday life," Hartman at last praises the Wanderer's "noble description of the Chain of Being envisioned at its fullest and most dynamic" (*Wordsworth's Poetry* 322) and concludes that "the specter of selfhood-solitude is purged, and imagination circulates rejoicing through infinite arteries of links" (323). However, Wordsworth's will to more direct social involvement after the so-called "Great Decade" (1798-1807), as exemplified by his pamphlet *The Convention of Cintra* (1809) and his patriotic sonnets, has utterly no place in both Bloom's quest-romance and Hartman's dialectic of the self. The irony is, as Stephen Gill puts it, "Wordsworth began to matter to his contemporaries just as, in the judgment of most critics [after Matthew Arnold], he stopped being an important poet" (viii). It is no accident that Bloom

considers *The Excursion* "an aesthetic disaster" ("Internalization" 19) while Hartman sees it as "the one great defect" (*Wordsworth's Poetry* 292). For the visionary critics love unearthly visions or "pure" lyrical effusions to no immediate social ends. Having overstated the turn from "the mirror" to "the lamp," they shy away from the intense lamplight of Romantic -- they would rather say "Victorian" -- moralizing. Concerning Wordsworth's more didactic *The Excursion* and his more personal *The Prelude*, a recent critic remarked that Wordsworth "gave his Victorian epic to the Romantics; his Romantic one, to the Victorians" (Johnston 291). If we have found this puzzling, or even regrettable, we should perhaps ask ourselves whether our stereotyping of the Romantics and the Victorians has seriously gone wrong. In *The Romantic Ideology*, Jerome McGann concedes that Hartman's early study of Romanticism is faithful to the Romantics themselves:

> Hartman's formulations are well known because they represent a contemporary academic consensus about Romantic literature. The strength of the position lies in the accuracy with which it reflects, or translates, the original materials. His is what Peckham would call a "pure" response to Romanticism, that is, one which is, despite its new terminology, "free of non-Romantic notions

inconsistent with the Romantic ... metaphysic." (41)

I would rather say that Hartman's formulations are not faithful but highly selective. Put another way, the Romantics' own views seem to be more diverse and ambivalent. Although in his preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth talks of "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings... recollected in tranquility," he also stresses, perhaps even more emphatically, that the poet is "the rock of defense of human nature" and "a man speaking to men," that "each of [his poems] has a worthy *purpose*" (*Wordsworth* 735-38). In other words, Wordsworth's understanding of poetry is not merely "expressive" but communicative and also moral. It should be noted that Wordsworth's early admirers were not so much concerned with emotionality per se, but with metrical beauty and Humanistic values. John Wilson, Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh and an important critic of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, valued the *Lyrical Ballads* next to his Bible when he was young (Rannie 250). Wordsworth gave immense attention to *The Excursion* (1814) because he wished to save himself from the charge of "egotism" and "puerility" directed to his *Poems* (1807). *The Excursion* was conceived as "a philosophical poem, containing views of Man, Nature, and Society," as a part of his never finished grand "edifice" *The Recluse*,

intended to be "a literary Work that might live" (*Wordsworth* 589). The curious fate is that *The Prelude*, when eventually published in 1850, did not make an immediate impact, but with the rise of Visionary Romanticism in this century, it has eventually replaced *The Excursion* as Wordsworth's *opus magnum*. Charles Lamb, however, loved Book IV, "Despondency Corrected," of *The Excursion* for its "moral grandeur," "for [the] wide scope of thought and a long train of lofty imagery [and] for [the] tender personal appeals" (Reiman A 2: 829). Jonathan Bate reminds us that: "The primary attraction of *The Excursion* for readers from its first reviewers through Ruskin to Leslie Stephen was its ethical content; it appeared to be Wordsworth's crowning achievement because it was the fullest embodiment of his philosophy" (64). Arnold is the first important critic who claimed that neither *The Excursion* nor *The Prelude* were Wordsworth's best works. Bloom mentions in "Internalization of the Quest-Romance" that Hazlitt and Byron also considered the poem a failure. But their objections to *The Excursion*, in fact, are quite unlike Bloom's or Hartman's. Byron, in a letter to Leigh Hunt, belittles Wordsworth's poetic talent and, relating *The Excursion* to mysticism, claims that: "who can understand him?" (*Letters* 4: 324) Byron's comments go well with a certain contemporary view on the "Lake Poets" as eccentrics who, confining themselves to the countryside, do

not "know the world." That Hazlitt is critical of the later Wordsworth is in part due to his detestation of Wordsworth's apostasy. In his review of *The Excursion*, Hazlitt compares Wordsworth unfavourably with Young and Cowley and laments the lack of primitivistic or Gothic colouring in Wordsworth's poetry. Furthermore, Hazlitt objects to Wordsworth's idealization of the country folk and sees Wordsworth's clothing of "the most insignificant things" with excessive "borrowed grandeur" as a breach of decorum (Reiman A 2: 527-28). Above all, with his usual exaggeration Hazlitt claims that Wordsworth writes "as if there were nothing but himself and the universe." While Hazlitt finds *The Excursion* too "egotistical," our visionary critics, symptomatically, regret that the poem is too much burdened with "didactic intrusions" and is thus not genuinely lyrical.

In Visionary Romanticism much effort has been given to systematize Coleridge's "metaphysics" in the light of German aesthetics. But the prize of such systematization is not only over-generalization but the oversight of specific social context, especially with respect to eighteenth-century poetic traditions, and the sociopolitical implications of Romantic poetry. Politics is not necessarily "Jacobin"; it may be Commonwealthian, republican, or Tory, and still should not be evaded. The

deepest problem of the visionary critics is precisely that they too readily equate radicalism with the guillotine, but at the same time they are weary of Romantic apostasy. Alluding to the history-making French Revolution, foregrounding the "apocalypse of imagination" while evading political contents or subversive innuendoes, the visionary critics, not the Romantic poets themselves, have turned what Irving Babbitt calls a "sham religion" into a "Romantic ideology." I do not agree with Butler's suggestion that the rise of Visionary Romanticism was directly related to academic radicalism of the 1960s, or, as Martin and Jarvis put it, a matter of "post-Romantic social non-conformists eager to find ancestral cultural-heroes" (xiv). However, it is tempting to see the curious emphasis on English Romanticism as a "revolution" rather than gradual transformation, as a "politics of vision" rather than a "weak grasp upon the actual," unearthly rather than Bohemian, and the underlying valorization of the sensitive individual and discontent with the "money-nexus" and Philistinism, as consonant with a certain post-war academic Liberalism.

II. Selfhood and Lyricism

Selfhood and lyricism are closely related. It is no accident that for Abrams, "some of the greatest Romantic achievements" are found in "the longer Romantic lyric[s]" ("Structure and Style" 201) and for Hartman, Wordsworth's chief accomplishment in the *Lyrical Ballads* is to have "created a principal form of the Romantic and modern lyric" ("Inscriptions" 39). By "lyric" is not meant, as in ancient Greek, merely a "song"; nor is music of much importance here. Rather, lyricism here refers to the expression of "feelings," not any feelings but "genuine," "personal" ones. The centrality of lyricism in Visionary Romanticism is very obvious, for the very notion of lyricism implies selfhood, the definition of what is "private" or "personal." The biggest problem is: what actually does the "personal" mean? And why is it that some poetic expressions of sentiments are perceived as "artificial" and "insincere" while others are valorized as speaking "the true voice of feeling"? Abrams, like most Romantic scholars, simply takes lyricism for granted. Fortunately, in Hartman's study of Wordsworth we can find some definitions of lyricism, albeit indirect or obscure, which may serve as our point of departure for a closer scrutiny of the relation between Romantic lyricism and selfhood.

In "Inscriptions and Romantic Nature Poetry," Hartman traces Wordsworth's transformation of eighteenth-century nature poetry into the "independent nature poem," a major form of Romantic and modern lyric. The inscription means "any verse conscious of the place on which it was written" (32). The particular form of inscription as "a vital intermediary between the conventional lyrical forms of the eighteenth century and the Romantic poem" is the nature-inscription, as one finds in Mark Akenside (39). According to Hartman, the nature-inscription unites "elegiac and locodescriptive poetry," and "is nearest in spirit, form, and potential to the Romantic lyric" (39). Hartman also draws our attention to the votive inscription. "Most nature-inscriptions are related to the votive or commemorative epigram," Hartman argues, "which plays an important role in the Greek Anthology and comes into vernacular literature chiefly from that source" (34). In votive epigram, "the inscription calls to the passer by in the voice of the genius loci or spirit of the place," "allow[ing] landscape to speak directly, without the intervention of allegorical devices" (35). The transformation from the inscription to the Romantic lyric requires firstly that "fugitive feelings are taken seriously," and secondly that the setting is enlarged to incorporate "in addition to a particular scene the very

process of inscribing or interpreting it." The setting, in other words, "is understood to contain the writer in the act of writing: the poet in the grip of what he feels and sees, primitively inspired to carve it in the living rock" (40). It seems that all the lyrical poet need to do is to contemplate nature and indulge in his "fugitive feelings," as if he were not trying to address a potential reader through poetry, which, in turn, necessitates the reference to poetic conventions. Obsessed with the notion of alienated selfhood, Hartman makes a very strange move. With regard to his example, "Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree," Hartman stresses that "the 'Nay, Traveller! rest' is the traditional *Siste Viator* of the epitaph" (34). Again and again alluding to the votive inscription and the epitaph, Hartman seems to be suggesting that the "solitary" poet must first die in order that his poem, the "living stone," could be invoked by the reader, the passer-by, resurrected "from stone to the spontaneity of living speech" (41). Wordsworth's own model of poetic communication, "a man speaking to man," is thus given a "morbid" twist.[2]

From Hartman's description, we may deduce that a "genuinely lyrical poem" (31) implies the *mimesis* of precarious feelings as experienced by the poet while "interpreting" the natural scene concerned. In *Wordsworth's Poetry*, Hartman writes that Wordsworth "rarely counts the

streaks of the tulip, but he constantly details the state of his mind" (5) and "he allows the emotion its own life and delights in new accesses of thought and feelings" (6). Besides, Hartman also mentions Wordsworth's "excessive involvement in random, personal experience" (4). Defending Wordsworth's acute "self-consciousness," Hartman claims that "the heart's response... is always too great or too small; and ... without this disproportion there is no such thing as man conscious of himself..." (6). Hartman seems to assume that emotions, if unrestrained, are necessarily precarious, random, unpredictable, following no "reality principle," and that these "personal feelings" could be spontaneously "translated," as it were, into poetry. About the first statement one need not dispute here. Suffice it to note that when Hazlitt and Jeffrey mentioned "precarious feelings" or "moods" in Wordsworth, they did not see such words in a post-Freudian perspective. Instead, they understood poetry as communication and tried to suggest the lack of significant or worthy meanings in Wordsworth's poetry. The second statement, on the other hand, has been discredited by most critics since the advent of Structuralism. This is not to deny that the mind, as Hartman puts it, "has its blissful islands as well as its mountains, its deeps, and treacherous crossroads" ("Anti-Self" 54). However, to be *mis en discours*, personal

experience has to be mediated by language, which implies the awareness of norms, preceding texts, and the writer's mental gymnastics while composing. The actual writing process is often, if not always, laborious. The first poem Hartman discusses in *Wordsworth's Poetry*, "The Solitary Reaper," for instance, has been revised at least six times. Spontaneity in Romantic poetry is deceptive, but "romantic revision," as Clifford Siskin puts it, "has done its work so well that the *sense* of 'natural' spontaneity and creative unity it produces blinds us to its pervasive presence in not only the actual rewriting of texts, but also in the initial composing, prefacing, and classifying of them" (28). The weakest point of Hartman's argument about Wordsworth's acute self-consciousness is his focus on the sheer mental act of introspection with almost total disregard for its contents. Reading "The Solitary Reaper," Hartman suggests that there is a certain "psychodynamics": the move from surprise to a sudden inward turn:

> Though the poem begins in surprise -- an ordinary sight is modified by an unusual circumstance: the harvester is alone and her song heightens the solitude where communal and joyful activity was expected -- surprise turns into something pensive, even elegiac. There is an inward sinking, as if the mind, having been moved by the Highland girl,

> is now moved by itself. The mystery lies in the sudden deepening, or doubled shock. (6-7)

The sight of a solitary reaper in a remote area of Scotish Highland, as Dorothy Wordsworth remarks in *Recollection of a Tour Made in Scotland* is "not uncommon."[3] More importantly, the lonely figure, as I have explained, is indeed quite popular in eighteenth-century genteel poetry and landscape painting, an archetype derived from the idea of solitary meditation of early Christian anchorites. And because it had become a cliché, John Dixon Hunt reminds us: "Poets, like landowners [of the *hortus conclusus*], announce[d] their commitment to philosophical retreat by displaying the emblems of hermit and hermitage instead of thinking for themselves" (6). What is really new in Wordsworth's poetry is to take a pedlar or a reaper to be the hermit-sage. Even if the first few lines may give the reader a sense of surprise about the loneliness of the girl in the field, this is achieved by well-calculated diction rather than "spontaneous overflow" of some obscure "fugitive feelings." The deliberate repetition of the idea of solitariness has been highlighted by G. Ingli James by means of italics:

> Behold her, *single* in the field,
> Yon *solitary* Highland Lass!
> Reaping and singing *by herself;*
> Stop here, or gently pass!

Alone she cuts and binds the grain.

(James' italics; James 71)

"The inward sinking or turning -- the reflexive consciousness," Hartman alleges, "is quite clear":

> The poet himself is made to stop, reflect, and listen, like a traveler who has come on the scene by chance. An image has "singled" him out. (7)

But the use of vocatives like "O listen!" and questions like "Will no one tell me what she sings?," one may argue, suggests a dialogue with the reader, an "outward turn," rather than an "inward sinking." Granted that Wordsworth does turn "inward," the contents of his "deep" thoughts, as represented by the following stanzas, are by no means precarious or random. Regarding the second stanza, the nightingale's sweet song and the cuckoo as the voice of Spring or rejuvenation are poetic commonplaces. In 1801, Wordsworth himself modernized Chaucer's "The Cuckow and the Nightingale." Certainly Wordsworth is also aware of Spenser's famous line from *Amoretti*: "The merry cuckoo, messenger of spring" and Sidney's poem "The Nightingale." In *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), in which "The Solitary Reaper" is first published, there is also a poem entitled "To the Cuckoo," though apparently without the Spenserian allusion to adultery. Coleridge quotes Milton's description of the nightingale from "Il Penseroso" -- "Most musical,

most melancholy" in his "To the Nightingale" (1795), and he even plays with the convention by writing "How many Bards in city garret pent... And listen to the drowsy cry of Watchmen, /(Those hoarse unfeather'd Nightingales of TIME!)" (*Poems* 44). In "The Nightingale," collected in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Coleridge quotes Milton's line again, but adds: "A melancholy Bird? O idle thought!" (38). What is special in *The Solitary Reaper*, as John Beer has observed, is that the association of the nightingale with the desert involves "a derangement of the geographical world extremely rare in Wordsworth" (135). Even so, there is no trace of "fugitive feelings" "too great or too small" for the theme. On the contrary, the four stanzas are logically organized. The first stanza introduces the scene and asks the reader to listen to the girl's song. The second stanza indirectly praises the sweetness and revitalizing power of her song by associating it with the nightingale and then with the cuckoo. The last three words of the second stanza "the farthest Hebrides" resituates the locality from the distant "Arabian sands" to somewhere nearer Britain, for the islands are situated off the West coast of Scotland. The third stanza, in the form of surmises, asks about the content of her song. In the final stanza, the narrator stops speculating and describes what he did and how he felt:

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang
As if her song could have no ending;
I saw her singing at her work,
And o'er the sickle bending:--
I listened, motionless and still;
And, as I mounted up the hill,
The music in my heart I bore,
Long after it was heard no more.

If "inward sinking" just refers to the line "I listened, motionless and still," then its content, apart from the girl's song, is utterly unknown to the reader, and whether it represents "random, personal experience" makes no difference. As far as understanding of poetic discourse is concerned, what matters is not self-consciousness but self-consciousness *of what*.

Another point worth noting is that the biographical information about the incident of meeting the solitary reaper does not suggest that the girl did sing. The more direct source of Wordsworth's poem, as Wordsworth himself acknowledged, is Thomas Wilkinson's lines in *Tour in Scotland*:

> Passed a Female who was reaping alone, she sung in Erse as she bended over her sickle, the sweetest human voice I ever heard. Her strains were tenderly melancholy, and felt delicious long after

they were heard no more.

(Qtd in Wordsworth, *Poetical Works* 3: 445)

Here, the reference to eighteenth-century poetic traditions rather than some unspecified and unspecifiable "self-consciousness" is useful for the understanding of the common theme and tone underlying Wilkinson and Wordsworth's texts. There is the Romantic, or many critics today would say "Preromantic," tradition of a primarily patronizing interest in primitivism and exoticism running all the way from Percy's *Religues* and Macpherson's *Ossians* to Scott's *Lay of the Last Minstrel*. The highland girl's song is enchanting not only because of the sweet voice, but because it is Celtic. Added to this are the traditions of sensibility. First is the genteel poetry of pensive rural retreat and "sweet melancholy," as represented by the Countess of Winchilsea's "A Nocturnal Reverie" and Thomas Warton the younger's "The Pleasure of Melancholy." In Wilkinson, "the sweetest human voice" is associated with "[tender] melancholy." The idea of "melancholy strain" is retained in Wordsworth's poem (line 6); its qualifier "sweetly" and "sweeter" appear in the 1827 and the 1837 versions respectively, though eventually replaced for stylistic reasons. Secondly, there is the sympathetic interest in the lower classes akin to evangelism and the sentimental novel which mark the democratization of sensibility since the mid-

eighteenth century. I shall deal with these traditions in chapter 4. What may be noted at this point is Wordsworth's curious ambivalence in mixing the more elevated genteel model of pensive solitude with the more radical practice of treating lower-class figures as objects of sympathy and contemplation. One thing which struck some of Wordsworth's contemporary critics as "egotistical," "childish" or "pretentious," as I shall explain in the later chapters, is not his solitary meditation, his inwardness or lyricism, but that his elevation is often associated with the humble and rustic life -- a breach of decorum and a sign of "bad taste."

One last point, not all Romantic poems are "lyrics" in Hartman or Abrams' sense. There are a great deal of poems by Crabbe, Scott, Byron, Southey and even Keats which are much more narrative than lyrical. And the Romantic verse narratives of the first three were immensely popular. Instead of seeing Romanticism as a sudden discovery of the "power within" and following Hazlitt to make a simplistic analogy between the French Revolution and a poetic revolution, it would be more realistic to see in it uneven developments and diverse interests in Medievalism, Exoticism, Gothicism, Celticism, imitation ballads, Hebrew literature, etc. Most nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century critics did not understand "Romanticism"

as a post-1789 or post-1798 breakthrough, and certainly not without reasons. Nor was there any simple relationship between radicalism and Romantic poetry, as I shall demonstrate in chapters 4 to 6.

CHAPTER TWO

Romantic Alienation Reconsidered

I. Leftist Interpretations of Romantic Alienation

Even historical-minded critics could not easily escape from the burden of the past. An unannounced point of departure for Raymond Williams' and Marilyn Butler's studies of Romantic alienation seems to be the exaggerated portrait of the Romantic as a solipsist alienated from the public.[1] And it is not surprising that in Williams' famous study *Culture and Society* (1958), the "Romantic artists" refer mainly to Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Byron, Shelley and Keats, rather than to Joseph Warton, Edward Young, Thomas Gray and William Cowper, or to Scott and Crabbe. The "Big Six" in the canon of Visionary Romanticism are all included, while the less visionary Southey still remains. Had Williams included Scott in his discussion and attended closely to the equally popular Byron, however, his conclusion would have been very different. Perhaps Williams' innovation is also his Achilles' heel: when most of the Romantic scholars in the 1950s were obsessed with the influence of the French Revolution on the "apocalypse of imagination," Williams turned, unfortunately too exclusively, to the much neglected scenario of the

Industrial Revolution. In the chapter entitled "The Romantic Artist," Williams does not mention "alienation," nor does he allude to the young Marx. But his characterization of "a radical change ... in ideas of art, of the artist, and of their place in society" foregrounds the Romantics' "feeling of dissatisfaction with 'the public'" (49, 51). He cites Blake, Shelley and Keats, and treats Wordsworth's "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" to *Poems* (1815) as paradigmatic of an "acute and general" change in the "habitual attitude towards the 'public'" (51). What Williams has ignored is the important fact that all the Romantics he cites, including Wordsworth at the time he wrote the essay, suffered from the lack of popularity or from attacks by their contemporary reviewers, and their uneasiness must therefore be understood in terms of a sour-grape psychology. In Williams' list of "Romantic artists," most were not very successful writers during the Romantic Age, now often taken to extend from about 1798 to 1830. Best-selling poetry during that period was written by Scott, Byron, John Keble, and Robert Pollok.[2] Savaged by hostile reviewers like Francis Jeffrey, Wordsworth's standing was especially low between 1807 and 1814. His popularity could not even match that of George Crabbe. And it was not until well into the Victorian Period that Shelley and Keats gained high reputation. According to Williams' account, the

Romantic predicament is general and grounded in the "institution of commercial publishing" (52) initiated in "the third and fourth decades of the eighteenth century" with the growth of "a large middle-class reading public" (50). Due to "liabilities to caprice" (50) and "professional pressures" (55) in the commodified and "impersonal" market, the Romantics during the early nineteenth century developed a negative habitual attitude towards the public. The most interesting and suggestive part of Williams' study is that, as defensive responses to this predicament: "a theory of the 'superior reality' of art, as the seat of imaginative truth, was receiving increasing emphasis ... [and] the idea of the independent creative writer, the autonomous genius, was becoming a kind of rule" (50). "In the continuous pressure of living, the free play of genius found it increasingly difficult to consort with the free play of the market, and the difficulty was not solved, but cushioned, by an idealization" (63). The mystification of art as transcending the mundane and the artist as autonomous genius, in other words, is "a self-pleading ideology" (63). This is similar to Anthony Easthope's explanation of "Romantic ideology" à la Georg Lukács that it is "a compensatory structure in which an imaginary subjective unity seeks to make good an objective lack" (21). However eloquent, Williams' argument is based,

in the last analysis, on a crude economic model: the change from aristocratic patronage, through subscription patronage, to "commercial publishing." Assuming for the moment that his generalization is sound, one still has to ask: why is it that some Romantic poets, rather than earlier poets or other writers, first dramatized the unhappy relation with the public? Given that most scholars have placed a great emphasis on the impact of the French Revolution and related radical intellectual currents on Romanticism, it is astonishing to find that politics in the sense of partisan or class conflicts plays absolutely no part in Williams' scenario.

In *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (1981), Marilyn Butler further elaborates on Williams' argument about the Romantic predicament as a general condition of alienation with respect to the "man of letters" or "artist-intellectual":

> Social changes, which put pressure on all sections of society, certainly did not spare the artist. It could be said that urbanization and the growth of a literate leisured class gave him an unprecedented freedom and status, as compared with his lot in the days of the aristocratic patron. But the new conditions, an art marketed rather than an art commissioned, also imposed upon the

> artist-intellectual the symptoms of dis-orientation. The necessity to communicate with a large public to which no individual could relate created large problems, of form and tone, and also imposed peculiar strains. Like the public posture of confident integrity, a syndrome of private neuroses has remained characteristic of Western intellectuals from that day to this. Alienation is perhaps at the root of them, and it is seen as early as 1750 in that hero and archetype of intellectuals, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the sensitive, near-paranoid ill at ease in an aristocratic world... With the modern man of letters, modern literary *Angst* was born. (71)

Butler's emphasis on the "symptoms of disorientation" and "peculiar strains" imposed by the market is reminiscent of Williams' emphasis on the capricious "free play of the market." But she goes further in connecting the artist-intellectual's predicament to "the frustrating and alienating experience of other citizens in an increasingly complex and specialized environment" under a certain capitalist mode of production. If, as Butler suggests, "the writer was not in a unique position," then she has to explain why only some Romantic poets and earlier artists, but not writers of popular novels and journalistic essays,

or the doctors, lawyers and other urban professionals, dramatized such effects of alienation. Why, one may ask, did Pope and Defoe so cheerfully accept the new literary market while some of the Romantic poets did not? Is it just a matter of the partial change from subscription patronage to bookselling through publishers and bookshops? If "professional pressures" means the obligation to conform to public taste and the need to write in great haste, then Scott is a good example showing how a writer could handle such pressures without anxiety. "I love to have the press thumping, clattering and banging in my ear," Scott wrote in his *Journal*. "It creates the necessity which always makes me work best" (122). If "professional pressures" means the difficulty of attaining popularity and economic security, then William Collins and even Samuel Johnson had experienced them without much public complaint. If the expression means the danger of political persecution, Leigh Hunt had been one such victim. But personal or professional frustrations did not necessarily make their writings particularly melancholic or angry. In his *Autobiography*, Hunt is quite good-humoured while re-telling his experience in jail as a result of having insulted the Prince Regent in print. Looking at a small garden outside his cell, Hunt will indulge himself in recollecting a passage of an Italian poet, or he will "shut [his] eyes... and affect to think [himself] hundreds of

miles off" (244). If anonymity, as Williams and Butler imply, is the key, then one may well ask in what sense most of the 3,000 or so readers of *The Spectator* were not "anonymous" to Addison and Steele. That "Rousseau, the sensitive, near-paranoid ill at ease in an aristocratic world" is taken to be the representative of the "modern literary *Angst*" is actually quite telling. In the case of Rousseau (1712-78), the morass actually had nothing to do with the mode of literary production or the bourgeois reading public, but much to do with his temperament, his progressive thoughts, and also his uneasy relations with other people, including not only his aristocratic patrons but also his friends like Diderot and David Hume. One of Rousseau's many problems was that, while being part of the Enlightenment, he reacted strongly against the limit of reason and opposed his former intellectual comrades. Psychologically, as Paul Johnson observes, Rousseau "emerged from childhood with a strong sense of deprivation and -- perhaps his most marked personal characteristic -- self-pity" (5). Brought up as a Calvinist, he ran away at fifteen and became a Catholic. Having tried more than thirteen jobs without much success, he published his prize-winning *Discours* on the arts and sciences and suddenly attained fame at thirty-nine. Given his vocational ambition, his self-conceit and past failure, his dependence

on women, on the aristocratic patrons and audience, and his social and educational ideas ahead of his times, his notorious social relations are quite understandable. Butler does make a point in suggesting that "Rousseau, like so many after him, experienced simultaneously a rage to reject existing society, and a yearning to be integrated with it" (71). Some English Romantics did suffer partly because of their radical sentiments and became isolated for the tide of radicalism had retreated after 1793, and however élitist their attitude might be, most of them did long for a sympathetic audience rather than just a small coterie of friends and followers.

In fact, the labels "writer," "poet," "artist," "intellectual" and "man of letters" shuffling in Williams' and Bulter's studies do not denote quite the same things. "Intellectuals" as we commonly see it today are not necessarily professional writers; with the *philosophes* as the exemplum, they are often defined by their critical attitude towards society and government and by their will to social reform or revolution. In modern times, Philip Rieff suggests, "the major political vocation of the intellectuals has lain in the enunciation and pursuit of the ideal" (32). As radicals or idealists, of course many English Romantic poets were frustrated by brutal social realities. Coleridge, especially, did not always fit easily with the

role of what Antonio Gramsci calls the "traditional intellectual," even after his apostasy. Another reason why the Romantic poets were likely to be dissatisfied by the public is that they refused to become "hacks," following some popular formulae they found distasteful or vulgar. If we mean by "men of letters" those professional writers who make a living primarily through publication in newspaper and magazines, then we should note that in journalistic writing rarely would they indulge in anti-public sentiments. In her discussion of Coleridge as a new type of "man of letters," Butler aptly highlights Coleridge's persona in essay writing, his "dignified, disinterested public tone, so typical of discourse in the Enlightenment, which is with us still in the leader-columns of *The Times* and the *New York Times*" (71). Genric norms certainly govern what could be said, including all the morbid feelings related to personal or professional pressures. It is significant that almost only in their private letters or journals did the Romantic writers and their predecessors vent their uneasy feelings about the reading public or about their profession. Wordsworth is perhaps the first famous writer who daringly expressed in an essay supplemented to the preface to his *Poems* (1815) his dislike of the literary reviewers and his loftiness in regard to popularity and the "unthinking" public. His feelings were not new; new were the occasion

and the form in which they were rendered into public discourse. With Byron and the French Bohemians, interestingly, defiance of the public could be "capitalized" and became a salable mark of personality. At any rate, there is no compelling evidence, with respect to our "Big Six," that "the public posture of confident integrity," as Butler seems to suggest, belies "a syndrome of private neuroses." And Butler's bold claim that "private neuroses have remained characteristic of Western intellectuals from that day to this" (71) has yet to be substantiated.

Butler is more helpful in suggesting the similarity between the Romantic and the Renaissance artist. Citing Rudolf and Margot Wittkower's *Born Under Saturn* on the Italian Renaissance artists' eccentric, Bohemian or saturnine "artistic temperament," Butler claims that: "What happened in Europe at the end of the eighteenth century may be at most a further series of social changes, which threw the emphasis on to the writer, even more than the painter and composer, as a man representative of the educated 'professional' class in everything but his eloquence" (72). Before one succumbs to this general thesis, however, one must clarify the actual conditions of the Renaissance artists. The "artistic temperament" of those painters and sculptors, one must note, was not so much a matter of "uncertainties built into the system of patronage," as

Butler has it (71). Instead, the Wittkowers' account seems to suggest that it was the rising self-awareness and vocational ambition, stimulated by the rising status of a few highly successful individual artists, that fired some aspiring practitioners into great expectations. The ambitious artists had to fight for precarious freedom and esteem against the still persistent old public contempt on the one hand, and restrictions by the guilds as a powerful institutional force on the other hand. When the Wittkowers discuss the "emancipation of the Renaissance artist," they have not lost sight of the simultaneous rise of the guilds. Quoting E. Zilsel's statistics, they wish to demonstrate that the status of the artists during the Renaissance, though improving, was still quite low: "The collective biographies of famous Italians, written in the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth century, included only 4.5 per cent artists as compared with 49 per cent writers, 30 per cent political and military heroes..." (13). In the present study I shall confine myself to the Romantic writers and neglect the Romantic artists in the sense of painters or sculptors. In England as perhaps all over Europe, there was no sign at all that the status of writers fell significantly from the Renaissance to the early nineteenth century. On the contrary, the rise of journalism and the commercial book market, made possible by the expansion of the middle-class

readers since the Augustan Age, had enabled some professional writers to enjoy great economic success and literary fame. Scott and Byron were two prominent examples during the Romantic Period. With respect to economic security, the English Romantic writers were not worse than the Italian Renaissance artists. To complicate the situation, one must note that among the six arch-Romantics, only Coleridge was a truly professional writer. The others had other financial resources. Besides, patronage of one form or another still remained during the Romantic Period. Wordsworth, for instance, enjoyed "many years of early liberty" in part because of a legacy of £900 left by his friend Raisley Calvert; the Beaumonts and Lord Lowther also offered him accomodation or financial assistance. Besides, Wordsworth received an annuity and he became a stamp distributor for Westmorland in 1813. With a patrician background, Byron and Shelley could live rather leisurely without jobs, even though they might often encounter temporary economic difficulties. Blake was a painter and engraver and little known as a poet.[3] Keats the "blue coat boy" gave up his medical apprenticeship for poetry at twenty-one. Although troubled by financial distress and ill health, Keats was still able to travel around the British isles and to Italy. Unlike Coleridge, anyway, Keats did not have a wife and children to support. If by "professional

pressures" we mean financial security related to the career of writing, then only Coleridge felt the full burden. Robert Southey, Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt were all men of letters, but unlike Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, they seldom despised the public or complain about the profession. Byron's showy anti-social sentiment was a special case. It must be stressed that Byron was not so much against the public as his fans but against his critics, as he dramatizes in his notorious *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. If he appeared to despise his readers, as a glamorous individualist he affected to despise so many other people.

If by alienation Butler has in mind the condition of "alienated labour" in a factory production line, she has to explain the irony that some creative poets who could afford to look down upon bourgeois city life and whose labour is supposed to be the expression of their individuality still had to suffer, perhaps even more seriously, from social alienation or professional pressures. Wordsworth, we remember, presented himself in front of the public as a poet living in rural retirement. Williams and Butler have not succeeded in proving that alienation due to the commodification of literature was particularly acute during the Romantic Period. From their studies, nonetheless, we could conclude that some Romantic poets, especially those

ambitious but unpopular ones, did suffer from a sense of alienation from the public. One symptom of Romantic alienation is the anxiety about poetic labour, or in David Simpson's words, "anxieties about the business of poetry, and its place in the labour cycle and in the 'respectable' world" (35). Simpson argues in *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination* (1987) that "anxieties about labour, poetry and property" is apparent throughout Wordsworth's 1807 *Poems* (26). Interpreting the Miltonic allusions in "Gipsies," Simpson suggests that the poem actually betrays "areas of concern for a poet anxious by personal and historical destiny about his relationship to society in general, to a wider reading audience, and to a particular, local community" (33). "Most of this poem's Miltonic allusions," Simpson tells us, "are to Book Four of *Paradise Lost*," particularly lines 352-55, 605-09, and 612-22 (31-32). I am not going to recount the detail of his somewhat oblique argument.[4] Suffice it to say that the main point is Adam's "censure of idleness and unproductive time" (32). "The poet may after all not be a productive ... labourer ..., he may be a Satanic figure, already guilty of vain and evil deeds" (33). Simpson points out that while writing this poem, Wordsworth was "living by the charity of others, rather than by the fruit of his own labour" (35). Having recourse also to contemporary representation of gipsies in non-literary

sources, Simpson claims that Wordsworth's supposed contempt for the gipsies, contrary to what most critics have believed, belies his envy of their "self-contained, integrated, paradisal" community (33). Throughout his book Simpson refers back to this theme of anxieties over and over again. Unfortunately, despite his interesting and meticulous textual explication, Simpson has not answered a fundamental question: why did Wordsworth, rather than Milton, Spenser, Pope, Blake, or his friend Scott, in the first place, suffer from such "anxieties"? A mere allusion to the Puritan work ethic will not do. A more comprehensive account must include, as I shall try to demonstrate in the following chapters, the development of the profession of English letters, and the relationship between the poet and the public. I shall argue that Romantic alienation bore no simple, direct relationship with the mode of literary production per se, nor was it mainly due to the poets' supposed "solipsism." Rather, it had more to do with the poets' uneasy relation with their contemporary reviewers, and with their reluctance to fall within conventional political and aesthetic pigeonholes. The fact that some Romantic poets but not all other contemporary writers suffered most from uneasy relations with the public, I shall argue, was related not just to temperament but also to the changing literary taste in the wake of the "sentimental

revolution" and radicalism, to the curious vocational identity of the poet and to the rise of literary reviewing. I shall not see with Williams that the transcendental ideals of poetry and the poet were just defensive reactions against the commodification of poetry or the "prolectarianization" of the poet. I believe it was essentially the other way round. The notion that poetry transcends partisan or sectarian conflicts and the idea that the poet is some sort of respected secular priest promoting the well-being of mankind, or "the rock of defence for human nature" was already there before Wordsworth first thought of his "poetic calling." The notion of the poet as an "autonomous genius" could be traced back to the Augustan Period, and the theory of the "superior reality" of art, as Williams himself has admitted, could be traced back at least to the Renaissance. When the political reality after 1794 had dictated that moral and aesthetic rather overtly political interventions were possible, the concern with what the poets should and could do with poetry thus became a major area of anxiety. Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* and Shelley's *Defense of Poetry* can be read fruitfully in this historical perspective.

II. Romantic Poetic Labour: Self-Realization or Alienation?

Perhaps the more useful part in Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry* is not the "*via naturaliter negativa*" but the keen observation that self-consciousness is *not* peculiar to Romanticism:

> It is a dangerous half-truth ... to connect Wordsworth's spirituality with habits of introspection spread abroad by such different movements as Protestantism, Rationalism, and Rousseauism. No doubt, as Mme. de Staël said, with her inexhaustible talent for charming vulgarization, while "the ancients had, so to say, a corporeal soul whose motions were strong, direct, and efficacious ... the soul of the moderns, nourished by Christian repentance, has fallen into the habit of continually returning on itself." (*Wordsworth's Poetry* 6)

Introspection and care of the self are not even peculiar to the moderns. F. George Steiner reminds us that "self-contemplation and the attendant discipline of confession played their part in the Christian's warfare against sin" (444). Michel Foucault in his *Le Souci de soi*, on the other hand, details the "*examen de conscience*" in pagan Antiquity, though Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self* stresses that "radical reflexivity," the adoption of "the first-person

standpoint," to be "aware of our awareness... [or to] try to experience our experiencing," properly began with St. Augustine (131-32). With respect to the early modern England, Stephen Bygrave has noted "the new lexicon of introspection which enters the English language in the period of Shakespeare' plays... such... as 'identity,' 'characterisation,' 'conscious' 'idiosyncrasy' and 'individuality'" and that "the *OED* cites nearly thirty new compounds with 'self' in the period 1580-1610" (8). Christopher Caudwell argues that "all the period from Marlowe to Milton was the... assertion of the self" (63). In *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt, influenced by Max Weber, traces the habit of "self-analysis" and "extreme egocentricity" in Daniel Defoe's characters to Calvinism. Stephen Greenblatt cautions that "after all, there are always selves -- a sense of personal order, a characteristic mode of address to the world, a structure of bounded desires -- and always some elements of deliberate shaping in the formation and expression of identity" (1). In any case, what Hartman calls "the shared fact of self-consciousness" had been well established long before the advent of Romanticism. As far as poetry is concerned, the more important thing is not, as Hartman suggests, "the way each poet faces it" (6) but the way each poet *writes* it. A specific question is whether there are some characteristic

themes concerning introspection or solitary meditations in Romantic poetry. Some cues can be found in Abrams' "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric." In its emphasis on the transformation of loco-descriptive poetry into the Romantic lyric, Abrams' article is remarkably similar to Hartman's "Inscriptions and Romantic Poetry." Again, lyricism is seen as the essence of Romanticism. But unlike Hartman, Abrams' does not hold that lyricism is necessarily related to precarious thoughts and feelings. Nor does he focuses on introspection per se. Rather, he alerts us to the affinity between Romantic meditations and an earlier religious mode:

> In the English literary tradition ... Romantic meditations had their closest analogue in the devotional poems of the seventeenth century... And those poetic meditations on the creatures which envision a natural scene or object, go on, in sorrow, anguish, or dejection, to explore the significance for the speaker of the spiritual signs built into the object by God, and close in reconciliation and hope of rebirth, are closer to the best Romantic lyrics in meditative content, mood, and ordonnance than any poem by Bowles or his eighteenth-century predecessors... The Romantic meditations... though secular

> meditations, often turn on crises -- alienation, dejection, the loss of a "celestial light" or "glory" in experiencing the created world -- which are closely akin to the spiritual crises of the earlier religious poets. And at times the Romantic lyric becomes overtly theological in expression... [though] there is little external evidence of the direct influence of the metaphysical poem upon the greater Romantic lyric... (225-28)

One might indeed trace morbidity and inwardness in Romantic poetry to the expression of "soul-sickness" in the early Judeo-Christian tradition, to the penitential experience of the religious élite. The self in Sir Thomas Wyatt's translation of the penitential psalms, in Stephen Greenblatt's reading, is "the individual, cut off from his kinsmen and followers" and suffering from "an unmistakably *personal* crisis of consciousness" (116-17), no less introspective, guilt-ridden and alienated than any of the English Romantics. In fact the biggest difference in the Romantic lyric, according to Abrams, is the inscription of "specific locality" -- the record of place and time of composition or of the excursion on which the poem is based. And this point is a very important corrective to the exaggeration that the Romantic self engulfed the external

world, that "Romantic nature poetry... was an anti-nature poetry" (Bloom, "Internalization" 9). The specification of place was a eighteenth-century convention common in the so-called "inscriptions" or "loco-descriptive poems." In William Lisle Bowles's *Sonnets* of 1789, much admired by Wordsworth and Coleridge, place or time, and sometimes both regarding the "origin" of the poems were given. Our question is: why did the Romantics, especially Wordsworth in his nature poetry, give such a great attention to the "trivial" particulars of place and time? To answer this question, I shall return to the issue of Romantic lyricism and examine it in terms of selfhood. There are at least two perspectives on selfhood, one is expressive and the other dialectical. By the expressive view I refer to Hegel's discussion of private property and the young Marx's discussion of productive labour. By the dialectical view I have in mind Greenblatt's celebrated study *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980), which, according to Alan Liu, also owes much to Hegel. I shall turn to Greenblatt in the next chapter. Both Marilyn Butler and Terry Eagleton have used the term "alienation" in their discussion of the Romantics' estrangement from the public. By "alienation" they probably allude to Marx's 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, which was first published in 1932 and translated by T.B. Bottomore into English in the early

1960s. Marx's notion of alienation (*Entfremdung*), borrowed from Hegel and developed in the *Manuscripts*, has been popularized by Erich Fromm and become widely known in the Anglophone intellectual circles. It is a pity that neither Butler nor Eagleton go directly to Hegel and Marx for critical insights. In what follows, I shall first draw the reader's attention to Walter Jackson Bate's prize-winning *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1970) and then discuss the expressive view shared by Hegel and Marx.

Intimidated by past literary achievement, the modern poet finds it hard to write something new, to "differ in order to secure identity" (8) -- this is Bate's famous theme. Although Bate tends to see this as a general predicament all the way from Dryden to the present day, he does highlight some important changes during the eighteenth century which are relevant to our discussion of selfhood and lyricism. One was the deepening and spreading of the concept of "originality" since the 1730s and 1740s. "Add to this the social appeal of the concept of 'originality': its association with the individual's 'identity' (a word that was now increasing in connotative importance) as contrasted with the more repressive and dehumanizing aspects of organized life" (104). Furthermore, the ideal of originality grew with "an ancillary ideal: that of *sincerity*" (107). What I wish to suggest is that lyricism,

sincerity and originality are closely related. Romantic lyricism, as I have said, means the expression of "private" or "personal" sentiments. To better understand the "lyric turn," one must ask what the "personal" precisely means, which would bring in such notions as privacy, particularity and normalcy. Privacy, according to Fernand Braudel, "was an eighteenth century innovation" (308-09). Originated from the minority Protestant groups' struggle for the freedom of religious beliefs against civil authorities, it gradually became a realm of personal beliefs "extended to include all beliefs that in the believer's eye do not endanger others" (Munro 8). For the radicals during the 1760s and 1770s and those after 1793, the awareness of "personal" or "private" thoughts and feelings versus the authorities and the general public must have become more acute. Coleridge's apology for his "querulous egotism" in the preface to his *Poems on Various Subjects* (1796) may best be understood in this perspective. "Compositions resembling those of the present volume are not unfrequently condemned for their querulous egotism," Coleridge wrote. The main reason for Coleridge's apprehension was not that his poems were too "lyrical" in the sense of excessive sentimentalism, but that, I would suggest, his were "prompted by very different feelings" (1135). Coleridge, then belonging to what Wordsworth called "the odious class of men called democrats," must be well-

aware of the fact that some of his "effusions" were simply too "different" for many of his readers who were no friends of Joseph Priestley or John Thewall. Included in this volume were such pro-radical poems as "To Priestley" and "To Erskine," and the more ambivalent ones like "Religious Musings." Priestley the eminent scientist and famous radical Unitarian minister had been a victim of reactionary mob violence; Erskine was the Whig lawyer who had defended the accused, including Coleridge's friend John Thewall, in the treason trial of 1794. What was largely an ideological problem in Coleridge's defense was disguised as a generic one: "But egotism is to be condemned then only when it offends against time and place, as in History or an Epic Poem" (135-36). "To censure it in a Monody or Sonnet," Coleridge continues, "is almost as absurd as to dislike a circle for being round" (136). Against his probable disclaimers, Coleridge skilfully persuades them: "Surely it would be candid not merely to ask whether the Poem pleases ourselves, but to consider whether or no there may not be others to whom it is well-calculated to give an innocent pleasure" (1136). Coleridge, as a poet whose "egotism" "leads us to communicate our feelings to others" is, as he presents himself, "innocent." The appeal to "poetic license" was, in a sense, an extension of the concept of "privacy." "There is one species of egotism which is truly

disgusting... that which would reduce the feelings of others to an identity with our own." Who are these "egotists"? Coleridge forcefully argues: "The Atheist, who exclaims 'pshwa!' when he glances his eye on the praises of Deity, is an Egotist; an old man, when he speaks contemptuously of love-verses, is an Egotist; and your sleek favourites of Fortune are Egotists, when they condemn all 'melancholy discontented' verses" (1136). Coleridge himself, no atheist, ascetic nor worshiper of Mammon, thus tactfully defends his well-meaning "egotism."

All through the eighteenth century, individualism had not only developed in the sense of acknowledgement and toleration of other people's opinions and behaviour but also in the sense of a curiosity about their difference. Once the reading public was interested in "private" lives, not only in what someone else as a particular individual did but also how he or she felt, then "personal feelings" became something valuable in literature. Even in the heyday of the neo-Classic quest for universals, we already detect in Defoe's novel an immense interest in the "private" lives of different people, even including thieves and prostitutes. The later rise of sentimental novels and the interest in biographical and autobiographical writings certainly paved the way towards the acceptance of lyricism as an essential element of poetry. In a passage added to his preface to the

1797 edition of *Poems* by Coleridge, Lamb and Llyod, Coleridge had said: "If I could judge of others by myself, I should not hesitate to affirm, that the most interesting passages in our most interesting Poems, are those in which the Author develops his own feelings" (*Complete Poetical Works* 2: 1144). "Spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" is of course a key phrase in Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Keats' idea that good poetry is the "true voice of feeling" and J.S. Mill's statement that "the poetry of a poet is feeling itself" (*Essays* 357) represented further emphasis on lyricism in poetry. On the other hand, the increasing demand for literary originality probably also reflected a deepened consciousness of private property, a result of the increasing commercialization of literature and of culture in general. In the older days when literature was not yet a cashable product, when copyright laws were non-existent or seldom implemented, and when personality of the writer had little to do with the popularity of his writing, the concern with originality was less urgent. Given the increasing concern with individuality and private property not only in England but also in other advanced countries in Europe, it is not surprising that both Hegel and Marx theorized on selfhood in relation to private property, labour and personality. "Property is the embodiment of personality," Hegel writes in *Philosophy of*

Right (51). For Hegel, there are three ways we can acquire property: "We take possession of a thing (a) by directly grasping it physically, (b) by forming it, and (c) by merely marking it as ours" (54). Among the three, the second means of securing private property is the most important, for through one's labour or "forming" activity one objectifies or express one's will and individuality. "When I impose a form on something, the thing's determinate character as mine acquires an independent externality," Hegel argues (56). Marx follows Hegel in seeing property as essential to self-realization. In the *Second Manuscript* he argues against the negation of "the *personality* of man in every sphere" in "crude and unreflective communism" and urges for "genuine appropriation" of private property rather than its abolition (153). For Marx, self-conscious "productive life" characterizes man's "species-life" (127). Through the objectification of labour, the individual "reproduces himself ... actively and in a real sense, and he sees his own reflection in a world which he has constructed" (128). The objects he produces "then confirm and realize his individuality" (161). Writing lyric poetry, in this sense, is indeed an ideal way of self-realization; lyric poetry, in other words, is the poet's perfect form of private property. One feasible explanation of the specification of place and time in Romantic lyrics, in this light, is the

authentication of the poem as genuinely personal "effusion," true expression of the poet's particular self. Bowles was one of the first who stressed that his poems were descriptive of "his personal feelings" which "naturally rose" from his real experiences during excursions. The avoidance of "poetic diction," the loosening of syntactic structure or rhyming, fragmentation, the detail of time and place of composition, the emphasis on spontaneity or sincerity of emotions -- all these were used by Wordsworth, Coleridge and their followers to create the sense that their poetry truly "originated" from the real interaction between the poet's own mind and the external world. The valorization of originality and sincerity did not so much entail increased "inwardness," "psychological depth" or "enchantments of Selfhood" but the growing cultural awareness of a "private sphere" as opposed to the "public sphere" and the related interest in "private lives," in "personality," in individual difference and the awareness of poetic labour in terms of personal creation, of "originality."

Perhaps the Romantic emphasis on sincerity or authenticity of personal emotions was also related to a reaction not just against "the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers" (Wordsworth, *Prose* 1: 116) but against the "vulgar" forms of sensibility as

represented by what Wordsworth had called the "frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" (*Wordsworth* 735) after the bourgeois "sentimental revolution." Hence the return to "pensive solitude" and "sweet melancholy" of genteel poetry with the lyrical transformation which made Romantic lyrics not only "elevated" but "original" and "sincere." Besides, the lyrical turn in Romantic poetry also paralleled the development in religion against the rising "man of science" who had challenged both the clergy's and the poet's claim to truth. Wordsworth's statement in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* that "poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge," "the first and last of all knowledge," while "the man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor" (738) could best be understood in terms of the poet's anxiety about the intimidation of science about his status as a generalist in a cultural élite. The appeal to the "heart" or lyricism in poetry, in this light, was a defense against the rising hegemony of science, a strategy akin to the turn away from the "head" in revealed theology. The emphasis on the sublime and the pathetic was an eighteenth-century heritage of sensibility. In Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* we have the first explicit theorization on how sensibility was "internalized" and linked to poetic labour.

The poet is here characterized not by his linguistic talents as by his "more than usual organic sensibility" (*Wordsworth* 735) and "a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions... do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events" (737). Reminiscent of the language of British Empiricism, Wordsworth's argument traces the "origin" of poetry not so much in sensory impression as in emotional response to external objects and, more importantly, the subsequent mental working on "emotion recollected in tranquility" "in a healthful state of association" in the poet. Given this expressive view of poetry, one need only go one step to claim poetic labour as an ideal way of self-actualization and poetry as an ideal form of private property. In the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth's view is not just expressive but also pragmatic. Having emphasized the lyrical aspect of poetry and defined the poet by his extraordinary sensibility, he acknowledges the aim of poetry as "giving immediate pleasure" to the reader and he elevates the poet's role to be "an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love" (738). "Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge -- it is as immortal as the heart of man," he claims. Nowhere in the preface does he stress the poet's individuality or "solipsism"; instead, he focuses on the

social and communicative functions of poetry. Nor is Wordsworth, like some later poets, excessively intimidated by the rise of science. "If the labours of men and science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive," he concedes, "the poet will sleep then no more than at present, but he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself" (738). In "A Defense of Poetry," written in 1821, Shelley claims that poetry "is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred" (7: 135). However, in Shelley's text one does not detect an apprehension about the rise of science. In his "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties," written in the 1830s, J.S. Mill offers a clear conception of the centrality of lyricism in poetry based on an unprecedented emphasis on the chasm between emotion and reason. Poets, Mill asserts, "are so constituted, that emotions are the links of association by which their ideas, both sensuous and spiritual, are connected together" (356). For the "naturally poetic mind," thought is "only [employed] as the medium of its expression" but "thought itself" is not "the conspicuous object" of

poetry (357). To the metaphysicians, man of science or of business, on the other hand, "objects group themselves according to the artificial classifications which the understanding has voluntarily made for the convenience of thought or of practice" (357).

Selfhood in the senses of dignity, introspection, autonomy, vocational ambition, personal responsibility and dignity, was already there long before Wordsworth and Coleridge. Self-awareness and the will to "self-fashioning," as Greenblatt observes, did not even "suddenly spring up from nowhere" at the turn of the sixteenth century (1). The Romantic innovation is not the exploration of psychological depth but the strategy of authenticating "poetic effusions" as original and sincere expression of the self. To say that nature in Pope is "methodized" and his feelings "impersonal" or "artificial," that "in such later poets as Dyer, Shenstone and Akenside, their verse is still heavy with epithets which blunt any innate sharpness of vision" (Roston 74) and that "the interweaving of thought, feeling, and perceptual detail, and the easy naturalness of the speaking voice ... characterize the Romantic lyric" (Abrams, "Structure" 211-12) is to take linguistic effects too much for granted. Nature, rendered into poetic discourse, whether with Latinate syntactic involutions and epithetizing or with "a selection of language really used by

men," is equally mediated by language. The movement away from neo-Classic poetic diction was a gradual one running through the entire second half of the eighteenth century with such developments as the Celtic revival, the interest in Hebrew literature and in the ballads. "Wordsworth's adoption of 'the language of conversation,'" as Mary Jacobus has reminded us, "had behind it a century of primitive pastiche -- whether Celtic, Norse, Oriental, or Turkish" (191). The deepening of awareness of privacy and the rising interest in personality were also a gradual one. When George Steiner writes that "the love poetry of Wyatt or Donne, where it is used frequently, can stand by itself and does not require a fourth dimension of biographical knowledge" (445), he is not suggesting that their feelings were necessarily "pretentious" or "impersonal." In a sense, all feelings are personal and therefore "lyrical." The point is, before the generation of Rousseau, the claim that the feelings were "genuine" and "truly mine" was rare,[5] and "on the whole, man's elevation depended on his adherence to normalcy" (Steiner 444).

Even with an expressive view of selfhood on Romantic lyricism, there is no place for "solipsism," for poetry is a form of social communication which always already presupposes the consciousness of norms or conventions. What we have in Wordsworth, reputed to be the most "egotistical"

of the English Romantics, is a fundamentally expressive-cum-pragmatic view of poetry. In spite of his emphasis on "poetic effusions," like Coleridge he always wanted to communicate his sentiments *to others*, if not the entire reading public, then at least his close friends. Had he cherished no wish of reaching out for the public, he would not have been so apprehensive about his critics and about the value of his poetic labour. As a poet, Blake was alienated in the sense of having a very limited readership. His visions are "personal" in the sense of being esoteric and few people understood him, but not in the sense of a reluctance to communicate or of an incomprehenable "ideolect" really severed from poetic traditions. Apart from the acknowledgement of particularity, the "personal," like its cognate "privacy," perhaps more often implies a deviation from cultural or poetic norms. What we find in the Romantic poetic experiment is not "fugitive feelings" (Hartman) or "the free flow of consciousness" (Abrams), but at most some new experiences, like Wordsworth's "strange fit of passion," not yet described in earlier poetry, or some new ways of articulating them. Here one must clarify Bate's notion of the "burden of the past." In previous discussions of Romantic selfhood, too much undue attention has been paid to inwardness and particularity. Sheer difference "in order to secure identity," in fact, is never desirable in poetry.

Bate must be well aware that the quest for originality is a dialectical one: changes always entail the awareness of previous norms and the respect for at least some of these norms while struggling to write something new. Change, as Clifford Siskin rightly insists, must be conceived with a sense of continuity, not "creative originality" *ex nihilo*. "Original" sentiments if unsanctioned by the appeal to some norms or reason would only strike the reader as "unpoetic." They would be denounced as "eccentric," "egotistical" or even "perverse" depending on how far they were perceived to diverge from established norms, propriety or common sense. It is an overstatement that "the Romantic revolt is in a sense not so much a revolt against the shared standards and conventions of an earlier age; it is a revolt in a more thoroughgoing sense, against the very existence of dominating shared standards and conventions" (Everest 5). Even the reaction against "poetic diction" does not mean that the Romantics were free from the "burden of the past," in the sense of established conventions. They still had to decide whether to use the Spenserian stanza, the ballad form or Miltonic blank verse, for example. That Abrams has found thematic affinity between seventeenth-century devotional poetry and the "greater Romantic lyric" precisely indicates that the Romantics were struggling for their own norms, new decorum. One would almost search in vain in Romantic poetry

for "personal" or "private" sentiments in the sense of "random" emotions or "precarious" thoughts. The English Romantics from Wordsworth to Keats all care about overt meanings and "purposes" of their poetry. Wordsworth's greatest wish was to write a grand "philosophical poem." For Coleridge, "no man was ever yet a great poet, without being at the same time a profound philosopher" (179).

Bate has exaggerated the "continued pressure for difference," the compulsion in the poet to try "desperately to be unlike" (10, 21). Romantic lyricism had at least partially solved the problem of originality. What one writes about might not be entirely new, but thinking that it is "deeply" rooted in authentic personal experience, as immediate impressions or "emotions recollected in tranquility," one could still claim that it is the "original" expression or objectification of one's "unique" self. The Romantics could also wishfully negate some past achievements to lessen the sense of intimidation. Wordsworth, for example, boldly asserted that "Dryden's lines are vague, bombastic, and senseless; those of Pope, though he had Homer to guide him, are throughout false and contradictory" (*Wordsworth* 747). That many Romantics turned from neo-Classicism to the older English tradition precisely indicates that they did not just want to be different, but also, and more importantly, to justify their difference by

appealing to some other norms or authorities. So it is not a simple matter of "our threshold of expectation had been constantly rising," as Bate phrases it (75). What most poets badly need, after all, is not "'originality' per se" (88) but public recognition, the *intersubjective agreement* that they are, in Wordsworth's words, "Labourers divine." And to be accepted as a great poet requires a great deal more than just to write something "new." Literary fame is not simply a matter of personal preference, or the precarious change in the public taste, but a historical product of canonization. That explains why Milton's contemporaries could afford to despise his poetry, but once he was "deified" in the course of the eighteenth century, few dared belittle him. Neglecting the social history of poetic production and reception, Bate has left many specific questions unanswered. One great merit in Bate's study is the sensitivity to how a poet feels. Bate mentions the "loss of self-confidence" (7) and that the poet's "anxiety" "is... a *psychological* imposition of [his] own" (88) which "is not at all historically determined and necessary" (88). But while accepting the significance of the poet's feelings, I shall contend that it is exactly the larger historical background which shapes how one feels about one's "poetic vocation," what one can aspire to and, to some extent, how one will interact with the public.

For an aspiring poet, "effusion" is only the beginning, public recognition leading to literary fame is always more important than "private" indulgence. The expressive view on selfhood, as we have seen, does not explain the poet's social alienation or anxieties. One major source of anxiety in some Romantic poets, as Raymond Williams has noted, was the "public." But who were the "public"? If it means the admirers and buyers of the poet's poetic works, then they must indeed be supporters of the poet. Even if they neglected the poet and did not buy his books, the poet need not feel apprehensive about them. After all, they were, as Williams stresses, "anonymous." The real cause of worries, in fact, could be found in the following sentence from Wordsworth's "Essay Supplementary to the Preface" to *Poems* (1815): "... lamentable is his error who can believe that there is anything of divine infallibility in the clamour of that small though loud portion of the community, ever governed by factitious influence, which, under the name of the PUBLIC, passes itself, upon the unthinking, for the PEOPLE" (*Wordsworth* 751). Who, then, were "that small though loud portion of the community"? They were, in fact, the critics, or more precisely, the literary reviewers, who had increasing influence on the success of one's poetry in the literary market. The "public" was only a "displacement" of Wordsworth's anxiety about the critics.

A seldom noted fact about the Romantic Period, John O. Hayden reminds us, is the "phenomenal outburst of periodical criticism" (ix). In the older reviews like *Gentleman's Magazine* (1731-1868) or the *Scots Magazine* (1739-1826), book reviews were still "often no more than a paragraph, and vied for the reader's attention with many other features, such as original articles, correspondence, and chronicles" (Hayden xi). "During the eighteenth century," John Wain writes, "magazines were for the most part owned and directed by booksellers... and the bookseller, a semi-piratical figure who had not yet developed into his respectable modern counterpart, the publisher, saw to it that reviewing was governed by a simple principle; his own books were praised to the skies... and those of his rivals plentifully smirched with mud." "Then, suddenly, the situation was completely transformed" (13). With the *Edinburgh Review* (1802-1929) and the *Quarterly Review* (1809-1968), there appeared not only long but serious literary reviewing. In the early 1820s, when reviewing was at its peak, there were more than thirty periodicals which regularly carried literary reviews. The rise of reviewing indicated not only the growth of middle-class readers who looked for guidance about which book to buy, but also the widening of the learned minority who were serious about literature. For a poet, the reviewer could be friend or foe. The beginner and unestablished poet

especially need favourable reviews. Popular poets like Scott and Byron, on the other hand, could afford to neglect unfavourable reviews. For an ambitious poet embittered by criticism, like Wordsworth before the mid-1810s, his attitude towards the reviewers would naturally be chillingly negative. With this in mind, I would like to return to Marx's discussion of labour, individuality and private property, to clarify one major aspect of Romantic alienation.

With Hegel and Marx's expressive view on selfhood and labour, I have suggested that Romantic poetry, with its fervent lyricism, may be taken as an ideal form of private property, the objectification of the self. Why, then, did some Romantics like Wordsworth suffer so much from an anxiety about their poetic product? Some cues may be found in Marx's discussion of alienated labour. For Marx, one's product would be alienated, lost, if one had to surrender it to someone else. Curiously, in a sense poetry as a discursive product would not be "lost," for what the reader buys is only a copy, a mechanical reproduction of the poems, while the poet could still be recognized as the "origin" of his poems. Marx's saying that "the more objects the worker produces, the fewer he can possess" is utterly irrelevant to the Romantic predicament. With respect to alienation of labour, Marx says that one's labour would be alienated if it

was under an "alien will," forced by material returns, or when "*my* means of life belong to *someone else*, that *my* desires are the unattainable possession of *someone else*, but that everything is *something different* from itself, that my activity is *something else* and finally ... that an *inhuman power* rules over everything" (178). What Marx describes here seems to apply to the factory workers rather than the Romantic poets. When the Big Six wrote their poems, they were seldom under urgent need for securing the necessities of life, nor ever directly under some "alien will" or "inhuman power." Economic burdens and worry about his work did once trouble Coleridge immensely in early 1796, as the following lines quoted from one of his letters testifies:

> The future is cloud, and thick darkness! Poverty, perhaps, and the thin faces of them that want bread, looking up to me! Nor is this all. My happiest moments for composition are broken in upon by the reflection that I must make haste. I am too late! I am already months behind! I have received my pay beforehand! Oh, wayward and desultory spirit of genius! Ill canst thou brook a taskmaster! The tenderest touch from the hand of obligation wounds thee like a scourge of scorpions. (*Letters* 1: 185-86)

But the "taskmaster" was in fact his supportive friend

Joseph Cottle, who later sent Coleridge some money in order to ease his mind. Coleridge's block, as with some Renaissance painters, seemed to be rooted in his high ambition in attaining "immortality." His anxiety was further complicated by his financial difficulty as well as his sense of responsibility which obliged him to complete his task for Cottle as soon as possible. If he would lower his expectations and be a more contented "hack," he might become just as calm and efficient as Scott and Southey. In general, the writing of Romantic poetry fits well with Marx's notion of unalienated labour. For Marx, one's labour is truly "his own" when it is "spontaneous," "free and self-directed activity" (125, 127). But alienation in the sense that one's product becomes an "alien, hostile, powerful and independent object" to one's own oppression could indeed be found if we attend to parody and to Romantic criticism. An unknown poet published a volume of poems in 1803, in which Wordsworth is parodied and plagiarized. In 1808, the "Lake Poets," especially Wordsworth, were mocked by a satire entitled *The Simpliciad* for their supposed degradation of true simplicity.[6] For the "Simpliciads" there were always some aggressive "Dunciads." When a Romantic poet's work was mocked or quoted out of context in unfavourable book reviews in order to demonstrate that it was "babyish," "sickly," "vulgar," "absurd," that "this will never do," when the

lines were incorporated into the critic's or parodist's text, turned against the writer's will, being parodied, sneered at, and subverted, then the poetic product, in a sense, was no longer the poet's own but had become an alien and hostile force against the poet. The parodist or more importantly, the rising critic, should he happen to be hostile, was exactly "another alien, hostile, powerful and independent man" (130) and "lord" of the poet's product in Marx's words (130).

With this reinterpretation of a major form of Romantic alienation, however, we still have to ask why, given the acknowledgment of their poetic talents, poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge still suffer from merciless attacks. Was it a matter of politics and "yellow journalism"? In the *Function of Criticism* (1984), Terry Eagleton suggests that Romantic criticism was "explicitly, unabashedly political," a regrettable sign of the "disintegration of the classical public sphere." Donald Reiman has pointed out that in the post-war period of 1816-17, "amid threats of rebellion on the one hand and reactionary oppression on the other, the criticism of literature, together with all other human concerns, lost its pretense of aesthetic distance." According to Reiman, "the reviewers for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* [established in 1817] completed the transition from the gentlemanly even-

handedness of Ralph Griffiths' *Monthly Review* and the *Critical Review* to open character assassination that had been begun by Croker and John Taylor Coleridge in the *Quarterly* and by Hunt and Hazlitt in the *Examiner*." "The reading public," Reiman adds, "was ready for scandal and pointed opinions," for "yellow journalism" (A 1: 55). However, in my study of the reception of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's early poetry in my last three chapters, I shall show that Romantic book reviewers still often appealed to reason, propriety and traditions. The critics, too, had their burdens of the past. Even if motivated by political biases or personal malice, literary criticism, no matter how insensitive and venomous, was still mediated by the normative notion of taste, and needed the sanction of "good sense." Was it, then, just a matter of the change in literary taste, that the Romantics were too much ahead of the times? The answer seems to be: it was not a simple matter of politics or of taste, but an entanglement of both, a muddled question of the politics of taste. During the 1790s, apparently most critics could still admire a poet whose political sentiments differed from their own. Coleridge's poetry was then well received. Contrary to the common mistake today that the *Lyrical Ballads* was too bold for its time, the book, though not a best-seller, still found favourable reviews. The war against the "Lake Poets"

was not started till Francis Jeffrey launched his attack on Southey in 1802. I shall return to Romantic criticism later, let me first discuss the Romantic's identity in terms of the contradictions between the exalted sense of "poetic calling" and the mundane situations of the poetic career in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Burdens of the Past: Poetic Vocation and Elitist Leanings

I. "High Poetic Calling" in the Shadow of Milton

In "A Defense of Poetry," Shelley's characterization of the poet often has a mysterious ring: "A Poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one" (7: 112) and "poetry is indeed something divine" (135), so he claims. In Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, instead of Neo-Platonism, we have German idealism: the poet "brings the whole soul of man into activity... [and] diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends and ... fuses" by "that synthetic and magical power" of imagination which "reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" (173-74). Although "transcendental" views on the poet do not appear in Wordsworth, a major topic in *The Prelude* is "poetic calling." The very word "calling" reminds us of a "burden" of the past, the weighty history of the rise of Protestantism, of the English Revolution and of the establishment of the secular profession of English letters. In the introduction to *The Prelude* Wordsworth has written:

> ... I, methought, while the sweet breath of Heaven
> Was blowing on my body, felt within

> A corresponding mild creative breeze,
> A vital breeze which travell'd gently on
> O'er things which it had made, and is become
> A tempest, a redundant energy
> Vexing its own creation. 'Tis a power
> ...
> Which, breaking up a long-continued frost
> Brings with it vernal promises, the hope
> Of active days, of dignity and thought,
> Of prowess in an honorable field,
> Pure passions, virtue, knowledge, and delight,
> The holy life of music and of verse. (*1805 Prelude* 2)

For Mary Moorman, Wordsworth was "visited once more by the creative spirit of poetry" in 1795 at Bristol, where "Wordsworth walked out into the open field near the town and chanted aloud something akin to the opening lines of *The Prelude*" (*Early Years*, 272-73). But what precisely does "poetic visitation" mean? Moorman continues: "But there is more in them than an outburst in praise of liberty and hope," for "they contain also a description of the spirit of poetry" (273). "He had once or twice attempted something of the kind before," she adds, "but never with such wealth of imagery and detail" (273). The strongest evidence for the visitation of the "vital breeze," in fact, is no more than

poetry itself. Whether and when Wordsworth experienced divine inspiration or even "poetic calling" is hard to ascertain. To claim that Wordsworth already had such experiences early in his life is to succumb, in Gill's words, to *The Prelude*'s "grand strategy of demonstrating how all of Wordsworth's experiences served to make him a poet" (9). Most probably, as Gill suggests, during "1797-9, [Wordsworth] had become convinced that he had a vocation, literally that he was called to be a major poet" (4). What really matters is not some obscure "epiphany" or "visitation" but the rationalization of one's career choice with an exalted sense of the status of the poet. David Simpson argues that "anxieties about the business of poetry, and its place in the labour cycle and in the 'respectable' world, in fact occur throughout the 1807 *Poems*" (35). I would add that without trying to understand Wordsworth's "great expectations" inspired by Milton, one could not fully explain his frustrations and anxieties. With respect to the lines quoted above, the claim that poetry is "an honourable field" is not new. And the problem of divine inspiration has already been dramatized in Plato's *Ion*. New in *The Prelude* is perhaps the naturalization of an old convention of invocation into vivid, "authentic" inspiration, suggestive of a firm conviction of "calling." In *The Prelude* Wordsworth sees both Shakespeare and Milton as

"Labourers divine" of "immortal Verse" (*1805 Prelude* 71). And yet his most important "ancestral poet," to borrow Bloom's term, is Milton rather than Shakespeare, for a "holy" profession of poetry independent of both the church and the court was almost inconceivable in England before Milton.[1] Milton is the first English writer truly independent of clerical and aristocratic patronage and widely read and recognized as a national bard. If we neglect the historical conditions which made "poetic calling" or "poetic vocation" possible in the first place, the talk of "burden of the past" or "anxiety of influence" is doomed to be incomplete.[2] Tasso's dictum "*Non merita nome di creatore, se non Iddio ed it Poeta*" (no one merits the name of Creator except God and the Poet) would remain empty, if not supported by the widening of middle-class readers and by the canonization of poetry within the formation of a poetic tradition as part of the national identity. In the beginning, Milton was interested neither in courtly preferment nor in the printed-book market. Having left Cambridge, he spent some six years on private learning. Later, during his Italian journey he was admired as a citizen of England, a country of greater religious and intellectual freedom than Italy. The journey "strengthened his sense of England's international responsibilities to radicals of other nations" and "intensified [his] *cultural*

hatred of popery and absolutism," Christopher Hill remarks (56). When he returned home, he was eager to contribute to social reforms as a progressive intellectual. From 1641 to 1642 he published five anti-episcopal pamphlets as intervention in national politics. Before he became the republican Council of State's Secretary for Foreign Tongues after the Civil War, he already "had a very considerable reputation... among the radical wing of the Parliamentarians" (99). As servant of the Commonwealth, in his writings he still warned against faction, corruption, tyranny and superstition. With the defeat of the "Good Old Cause," Milton was jailed for a while and lost most of his property. Under the threat of censorship in Restoration England, he had given up political pamphleteering and turned to the exalted, prophetic voice of poetry. "In his priestlike role," Hill comments, "the poet is a potential Messiah, a Son of God" (357). Although his last three great poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* are all full of political and sectarian allusions, they are not overtly militant like his earlier pamphlets nor heretic like his *De Doctrina* published posthumously. When he published his *Paradise Lost* in 1667, though poor, he was not so much interested in monetary rewards as in the complimentary copies, which he could send to his preferred readers, the intellectual élites of Europe. *Paradise Lost*

was soon translated into French, Dutch, German, Italian, and Latin. With his international fame, the older Milton was much visited by the learned and by foreigners who came to the place where he was born. He is the first English writer who enjoyed such a status. "No genuine edition of an English author appeared," Saunders points out, "until Patrick Hume honoured Milton by treating him as akin to a classical author, in his edition of 1695" (97). Critical of the court, of the established church and of orthodox Puritanism, Milton had nonetheless come to be widely accepted by readers across the Tory and Whig lines during the Augustan Period. Poetic sublimity transcended politics and religion. Joseph Addison, John Dennis, Samuel Johnson, like the Romantics, were among the admirers of the "gigantic loftiness" of Milton's poetry. T.S. Eliot has said that: "Of no other poet is it so difficult to consider the poetry simply as poetry, without our theological and political dispositions, conscious and unconscious, inherited or acquired, making an unlawful entry" (*On Poetry* 148). Still, after his death, with the growth of middle-class readers since the late seventeenth century, Milton's poetry had come to be widely received. In the eighteenth century, *Paradise Lost* had run over a hundred editions, including Thomas Newton's 1749 edition, the first variorum edition of an English writer, and John Wesley's simplified version for the

less cultivated Methodist readers. Milton's spectacular success is inconceivable without the emergence of the printed-book market, the drive towards unity in the appeal to "Englishness" already initiated in the seventeenth century, and the growth of readership in the aspiring middle class. Besides, Milton's achievement was not only economic but there was also, to borrow Lewis Coser's words, enormous "psychic income" (3). Without his example, it is likely that the young Wordsworth would not have given up the opportunity of a clerical profession and Keats would not have given up his medical apprentice in the name of "poetic vocation."

"Calling" in Milton is thoroughly religious, indicative of a strong moral sentiment in the Protestant elect. He seems to have believed that the writing of *Paradise Lost* was really heavenly inspired. He desperately wanted to publish the poem not because of personal vanity but because of the conviction that he had some divine messages to "reveal." His "calling" is thus similar to an old sense of "vocation" (*vocatio*), meaning "the action of God in calling a person to exercise some special, especially spiritual, function." But in Milton we already see the first sign of the new sense of "calling" or "vocation," meaning a worldly career, profession or business. He is indeed the first poet capable of gaining great international fame as well as considerable

economic reward through printing and publishing his works. The modern sense of the word "calling," Max Weber has argued in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, was "a product of the Reformation," originated in Protestant translations of the Bible (80). No longer restricted to direct clerical service, "calling" had come to mean "a life-task, a definite field in which to work," related to the new emphasis on "the valuation of the fulfilment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume" (79-80). None of the major Romantic poets except Blake were deeply religious. Although Coleridge reacted against rationalism and atheism in Godwin, his poetry was not meant to "justify the ways of God to men." And however they might resemble the middle-class Protestant merchants, entrepreneurs, or professionals in their "morality of success," the Romantics were all idealists in their valuation of "dignity and thought" or "pure passions, virtue, knowledge, and delight" over economic success. For Shelley, "poetry, and the principle of Self, of which money is the visible incarnation, are the God and Mammon of the world" (7: 134). Religion had declined, but not spirituality in poetry. Etymology tells us that the word "literature" embraced all "polite or humane learning" throughout the seventeenth century. There was not yet a clearly autonomous realm of "literature" severed from

political, religious or philosophical concerns.[3] By Johnson's age, Sharpe and Zwicker contend, "we find not only the first clear recognition of a sphere of 'literature' but as well the creation of its most consciously autonomous mode: the novel," of "a distinct literary spirituality unimaginable in the seventeenth century" (10). Perhaps "literary spirituality" is more marked in poetry than in the novel; and it depends not only on authorial intention but on reception, as demonstrated by the case of Milton. And the talk of literary autonomy without further specification of autonomy *from what* could be misleading. The wish that literature, as refined writing, could transcend political and religious struggles was already apparent during the Restoration and even more obvious in the days of Addison and Pope. Richardson and Fieldings were famous for the obsession with middle-class moral reform in their popular novel. That literature had been emancipated from the web of partisan and sectarian entanglement did not mean that it had lost its broader moral or political concerns. Indeed, before the mid-nineteenth century, the notion of "art for art's sake" was still alien to the English writers. A recent study by Laurence Lockridge has detailed the Romantics' "will to value" rather than *l'art-pour-l'art* aestheticism (3).

Another difference between the Romantic poet and other

Protestant, bourgeois "self-made men" is that few poets exemplified a "Protestant ethic" in the sense of well-disciplined hard work and frugality. Wordsworth and Southey in their maturity were perhaps closest to the Puritan ideal. But others, like the ambitious Italian Renaissance painters and sculptors depicted in the Wittkowers' *Born Under Saturn*, exhibited symptoms of the "artistic temperament" like being "egocentric, temperamental, neurotic, rebellious, unreliable, licentious, extravagant, obsessed by their work" (xix). The Romantics were spiritual sons of Milton. However, according to those who knew him, Milton had a "sweet and affable nature" and "very cheerful humour" (Hill 57). Although Milton suffered from the failure of republicanism, he had the calmness and self-confidence to perfect his last three great poems with an assured, elevated tone and grandeur. A strong moral obligation to fulfil the "calling" based on religious ardour, I suppose, is the main reason for Milton's emotional security. But when the radical thoughts associated with the French Revolution had shattered the orthodoxies and the failure of the Revolution had in turn undermined radicalism, the Romantics were more likely to suffer from identity crises. The "emancipated" poets, full of ambitions, yet facing a reactionary political ambience and the realistic demands of the literary market, naturally found their "high poetic calling" frustrated. In

Biographia Literaria Coleridge refutes the popular belief that the poetic genius must be irritable. Only those "scribblers" who enjoyed "short-lived success" would "sooner or later... awake from their dream of vanity to disappointment and neglect with embittered and envenomed feelings" (23-24). In the period between 1789 and 1803, however, again and again Coleridge himself had lamented that his Muse was gone and he felt "a haunting sense" of weakness, as Norman Fruman has well documented in *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel* (328). "For someone as destructively insecure as Coleridge," Fruman lucidly explains:

> Continual understanding, sympathy, encouragement, and praise were the fresh breezes of creative life. But this he did not receive from his wife, or from Southey, or -- eventually -- from the Wordsworths. It was not happiness as such that spurred him on during the *annus mirabilis*, but rather (among other influences) William and Dorothy's affection and admiration. Their love and approval served as a counterweight to that despondency which always threatened to pull him into the abyss. (332)

Wordsworth, with his robust emotional health, his supportive family and some admirers, did not suffer from blockage and self-doubt. Even so, with the lack of popularity and

academic recognition, he was deeply apprehensive about the public and the critics before the 1820s, as we have seen. Temperament is something difficult to explain; it is tempting to invoke the facile term "over-determination." Still, one may venture to generalize that: putting aside other psychological props, without the "great expectations" about the "poetic vocation" modelled on the unprecedented success of Milton, the sense of failure or disillusionment in the poet would not be so acute. If Coleridge had seen himself as a "hack" rather than a poetic genius, he would not have been over-burdened by the feeling of weakness. Indeed, even during his most depressed periods, Coleridge could still manage to produce prolific journalistic writings. The reason was that it is in poetry, rather than prose, that he had aspired for "literary immortality." With the Romantics we often talk about "poetic calling," but never "calling of prose" or "prosaic calling." "Prosaic," according to the *OED*, has come to mean "lacking poetic beauty, feeling, or imagination; plain, matter-of-fact" since the mid-eighteenth century, and "unromantic, commonplace, dull" since the early nineteenth century. Comparing the relative value of poetry and prose, Wordsworth has written that: "of two descriptions, either of passions, manners, or characters, each of them equally well executed, the one in prose and the other in verse, the verse will be

read a hundred times where the prose is read once" (*Wordsworth* 740). The aspiration "to be read a hundred times" was apparent in most, if not all, Romantic poets. "The canonical Romantic poets," Anne Mellor contends, "all worked within ... [the] 'higher' genres of poetry, writing epics (*Jerusalem, The Prelude, Don Juan, Hyperion*), heroic verse tragedies (*Prometheus Unbound, Manfred*), elegies (*Adonais*), and developing new forms both of the satire (*Don Juan*) and especially of the prophetic ode, namely, the Pindarick (*Immortality Ode*) and that form which more than any other, Meyer Abrams claimed, characterised Romanticism, the 'Romantic odal hymn' (*Ode to the West Wind, Ode on a Grecian Urn, Dejection: An Ode, Tintern Abbey*)" (6).

"High poetic calling" not only implied the grand style; historically, it was also associated with the appeal to nationalism. "National sentiment in England," Hill reminds us, "had been intimately associated with Protestantism ever since Henry VIII declared England's independence of the papacy" (13). For some Protestant radicals like the Millenarians in the 1640s, England was the chosen nation while the Pope was the Antichrist to be defeated. The common people, rather than the royal government, however, were to represent the elect nation. With the formation of Whig-Tory party politics and the "Glorious Revolution," the radical Dissenters were suppressed along with the Catholics,

and the drive towards cultural concensus often involved the appeal to nationalist sentiment, but it had already been purged of radical connotations. The Augustan Age was an age not only of the printed market but also of the ascendency of the higher middle-class. Associated with the rise of what Viscount Bolingbroke saw as "*novi homines*" was the emergence of coffee-house society.[4] The coffee house, as Beljame had noted, was a place for the mixing of the nobility and the bourgeoisie, where class distinction became less important. For Habermas, the coffeehouse society and the closely-related middle-class journalism represented the emergence of a "bourgeois public sphere," where "private people [came] together as a public[,]" claiming power in "rational-critical debate" (*öffentliches Räsonnement*) against the arbitrary authority of the nobility (27-28). The "major impulse" of the "English bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth century," Eagleton suggests in *The Function of Criticism*, "is one of class-consolidation, a codifying of the norms and regulating of the practices whereby the English bourgeoisie may negotiate a historic alliance with its social superiors" (10).[5] Both Habermas and Eagleton have stressed the consensual character of Augustan culture, but they have neglected that the appeal to nationalism played an important role in fostering social unity. The pride in the rise of "happy Britannia" as a world power

owing to her prosperous commerce and naval power, rather than an emphasis on Protestantism, underlined such famous poems as Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*, Pope's *Windsor Forest*, and James Thomson's "Rule, Britannia!" National sentiment was a powerful force behind the establishment of a tradition of English literature in the course of the eighteenth century. Back to the Restoration Period, "the role of Shakespeare on the ... stage, the celebration of his 'native' genius," Sharpe and Zwicker argue, "expresses a polemical need for an English authority as a counterweight to French cultural models" (12-13). Although some Augustan writers acknowledged the greatness of Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton, their true heroes were more often the ancient Greek and Roman writers like Homer and Virgil. Nevertheless, the status of English writers had definitely been uplifted since the second half of the seventeenth century. Milton, as we have seen, enjoyed great popularity and international fame. Pope published an edition of Shakespeare in 1725, and Theobald published his in 1733. Thomas Warton the younger's *History of English Poetry* (1774-81) is perhaps the first comprehensive study of the English poetic tradition. The historical and comparative studies by such scholars as Warton, Richard Hurd and Thomas Percy in effect foregrounded the national heritage of Shakespeare, Milton, and the ballads. By the time of William Hazlitt,

the idea that Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spencer and Milton represented the monuments of English poetry did not seem to need apology or argument. Referring to the dominant idea of social unity during the eighteenth century, John Barrell contends that the "conception of English culture as itself a source of national pride was of course related to the increasing awareness of, and pride in, the economic power of the nation..." (*English Literature in History*, 21). The popularity of Milton, the greatest Protestant poet profoundly conscious of his national identity, and his canonization in the English poetic tradition may well be understood in this light.

After the revival of radicalism in the course of the American War of Independence and the French Revolution, for the Romantics like Wordsworth, the aspiration to be a poet like Milton who could win almost unanimous national respect was necessarily fraught with difficulties, because the English intellectual life had already been riven by ideological conflicts. Or, as Eagleton would put it, the golden age of "bourgeois public sphere" had gone. Within Wordsworth, one could detect at least "two voices." One, as Abrams puts it, is "an elevated oracular voice"; the other is his "popular, inartificial style" closer to "humble and rustic life" ("English Romanticism" 112) or, as Hazlitt would call it, the "levelling muse." In the *Lyrical*

Ballads, the contemporary reviewer Dr. Charles Burney already found in *Tintern Abbey* "reflections of no common mind; poetical, beautiful, and philosophical" (Reiman 2: 717). Apart from that of the Miltonic prophet, in Blake, Coleridge, and especially in Wordsworth there was also the humbler, lower voice, a heritage of the "Preromantic" interest in ballads and Hebrew literature. Of course, the adoption of less elevated style did not necessarily imply the allegiance to the radical cause in politics. Even Johnson had a patronizing interest in the ballads. But in the 1800s, some critics had come to associate the lower style with Jacobinism, or at least the indication of subversiveness and bad taste. But the relationship between radicalism and Romanticism was indeed much more complicated. The "Lake Poets" were famous for their "apostasy," while Byron and Shelley were recognized as radicals. Some of their critics, like Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt, were radicals while others, like Jeffrey, were more conservative. And yet political radicalism and literary taste bore no simple correspondence. The uneasy relations between the "Lake Poets" and some of the influential critics like Jeffrey during the 1810s and 1820s had a great deal to do with their political ambivalence and, later, apostasy.

In emphasizing the influence of Milton, I may have risked over-generalization. In fact, apart from "poetic

calling," there was also the "calling for social changes" in some Romantics, by which I refer to the role of progressive intellectuals as exemplified by the Renaissance Humanists, the French *philosophes* and the British "Jacobins." Coleridge was a "critic of society" in his public lectures and journalism, as John Colmer has demonstrated, but not, indeed, in his poetry.[6] In 1798, Wordsworth already decided that his greatest poetic project was to be *The Reculse*, a "philosophic" poem expressing his "views of nature, man and society," a project he had never accomplished. In the 1790s, even after they had given up radical political writing, Wordsworth and Coleridge still cherished the hope that by dealing with more fundamental moral or philosophic issues they might "benefit mankind" by promoting social reform. For Shelley, "the most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution, is Poetry" (7: 140). His *Queen Mab* was perhaps the only oblique success, for the subversive poem, to his surprise, was read by working-class radicals in cheap private editions and became the "Chartist's Bible."[7] But aspiring to be an immortal poet rather than a William Cobbett or a Hannah More, the English Romantics had found their roles in changing society all the more difficult.

II. "Mob-Readers," Failures of the Time, and Self-Fashioning of the Cultural Elite

In Romantic scholarship it has been too often stressed that the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) was a reaction against neo-Classic "intellectualism" and "poetic diction"; too little attention, however, has been paid to Wordsworth and Coleridge's reaction against sentimental and sensational popular literature. "In literature as in the visual arts a reaction and even a revolution" against neo-Classicism proper, Marilyn Butler argues, "was already occurring by about 1750" (19). If in the late 1790s Wordsworth and Coleridge were still only reacting against Latinate syntactic involutions and epithetizing, they could hardly claim novelty in their alleged "experiments." A seldom noted fact is that, in 1794, Wordsworth criticized "the trash which infest[ed] the magazines" (*Letters: Early Years* 126), and Coleridge regretted that some of his own lines were "most miserably magazinish" (*Letters* 1: 141). In the advertisement to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) Wordsworth complains of "the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers" as "the prevalent fault of the day," and opts for "the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society" (116). But in his 1800 preface, Wordsworth also protests that: "The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare

and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" (*Lyrical Ballads* 160). In so writing, surely Wordsworth had in mind sentimental and Gothic novels, "Magazine-poetry," and sensational ballads of the day as represented by Gottfried Bürger and his lesser imitators, which were hardly products of neo-Classicism as established by Dryden and Pope.[8] As Coleridge had said that the 1800 preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* was "half a child of [his] own Brain" (*Letters* 2: 830), I shall take the preface as representative of the views shared by Wordsworth and Coleridge at least during the late 1790s and early 1800s.[9] In *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's* Lyrical Ballads *(1798)*, Mary Jacobus has observed that popular balladry had almost no direct influence on the *Lyrical Ballads*. The "Ancient Mariner," according to the advertisement, "was professedly written in imitation of the *style*, as well as of the spirit of the elder poets" (*Prose* 117). Wordsworth's originality, Jacobus ably demonstrates, "lay in approaching the imitation ballad from a startlingly anti-literary direction" (212), intended for "literate readers" who could "think about their own code" (239). However much Wordsworth and Coleridge might differ from some Augustan writers in their views on literature, they shared a craze for sublimity, an interest, if somewhat antiquarian, in ballads,

and the related self-consciousness of being a cultural élite. Indeed, Joseph Addison's defense of the ballad "The Babes in the Wood" could have been written by Wordsworth: "This Song is a plain simple Copy of Nature... [and] because the Sentiments appear genuine and unaffected, they are able to move the Mind of the most polite Reader with inward Meltings of Humanity and Compassion" (Bond 1: 362-63). No doubt Wordsworth and Addison disagreed on what they thought to be good poetry. As a neo-Classicist Addison rejected "all the Extravagance of an irregular Fancy" (Bond 1: 268) and adhered to the "celebrated Works of Antiquity" (Bond 3: 528). And yet Addison's complaint that "the Taste of most of our *English* Poets, as well as Readers, is extremely *Gothick*" (Bond 1: 269) reflects an élitist mentality not, indeed, remote from Wordsworth's own. Commenting on the Augustan insistence on "Taste," Joan Pittock has written that: "For a nobility which had become respectable, a landed gentry, and an aspiring middle class, increasingly wealthier through trade and commerce, an attractive social ideal was that of the man of taste -- the educated, well-bred, witty *arbiter elegantiarum* ..." (5).[10] Following Dryden, Addison despised "Mob-Readers," or "*Les Petits Esprits*, such things as Upper-Gallery Audience in a Play-house," the embodiment of "Coarseness of ... Taste" (Bond 1: 269). Despite Wordsworth's genuine interest in *appropriating* the language

of the low and rustic life for "the purposes of poetic pleasure" (*Prose* 116), his apprehension about fashionable and popular literature and his subtly patronizing attitude towards ballads indicates an acceptance of, rather than a radical break from, the "burden" of the Augustan "*arbiter elegantiarum.*" I shall return to this ambivalence later.

Compared with the French precedent, English neo-Classicism, as many critics have noted, was much more liberal and flexible.[11] Still, in condemning "false wit" or coarse taste, there was an unmistakable sense of class or cultural superiority. On Addison, T.S. Eliot has remarked: "Gentleman as he is, he has a very low opinion of those who are not genteel" (*Use of Poetry* 61). "It is tempting," David Punter states, "to see in Augustanism the doctrine of a small cultural élite holding on to power and status under increasing pressure, and that pressure as precisely that exerted by the new reading public on the homogeneity of the old literary establishment" (*Literature of Terror* 31). But the homogeneity perhaps never did exist. Here we come to the question about the nature of "Preromanticism" or eighteenth-century Romanticism, which, according to Eric Partridge's *Eighteenth Century English Romantic Poetry* (1924), began "with the Countess of Winchilsea's *Miscellany Poems* published in 1713" and "kept on its course fairly continuously and with increasing strength" (11-12). Apart

from the more cosmopolitan and public neo-Classical style as perfected by Addison and Pope, there were the "country tradition" of pastoralism and "pensive solitude," the religious tradition of devotion, meditation and sublimity, and, especially since the mid-eighteenth century, the growing interests in Medievalism, Exoticism and Primitivism, what we now often recognize as the precursors of Romanticism. But "Preromanticism" was not really perceived by the Augustans as a dangerous opponent of neo-Classicism. Joseph and Thomas Warton, for instance, have been regarded as Romantics or Preromantics since the nineteenth century, but to their contemporaries, as Pittock comments, "there had seemed little that was startlingly new in their work" (1). The enthusiasm in Medievalism, Hebrew literature or Gothic ruins, and the scholarly, if not patronizing, interest in ballads and Celticism, like the *hortus conclusus*, were part of the aristocratic and upper middle-class culture; there was, at least initially, nothing "bourgeois" about them. Percy, whose *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), Wordsworth claims, "has ... absolutely redeemed" English poetry (*Wordsworth* 749), is certainly a serious scholar. "Preromanticism," in this sense, should better be seen as a relatively benign move away from Augustan "intellectualism," the Classical models and the influence of the famous thesaurus *Gradus ad Parnassum*, rather than a dangerous

"alien."[12] Besides, the "Preromantic" interest in the indigenous English poetic tradition, as I have mentioned in the previous chapter, was related to the fostering of national identity in the course of the eighteenth century. What then, one may ask, was the "alien" or "threatening Other" for the "small cultural élite"? The answer, I would say, is "vulgarity" of the rising "Mob-readers," consumers of "Gothick" poetry, "cheap" drama and the popular novel. Pioneered by Defoe, further developed by Richardson, Fielding and Sterne, and later in the century by Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, the novel had attracted a large readership including leisurely women, young men and perhaps even, Ian Watt suggests, "apprentices and household servants" (52). As Watt and many others have agreed, the novel was essentially a bourgeois form. Defoe may be seen as the first great bourgeois writer. "His practical and utilitarian spirit," Issac Kramnick argues, "enshrined the useful, the handy, the profitable; his was the spirit of self-interest, avarice, and individualism" (193). What in Defoe's novel might offend the "man of Taste" was that the characters were mainly of the lower middle-class, lower classes and even outlaws. Admittedly, some novelists had become more respectable and even enjoyed international fame since the mid-eighteenth century. Nevertheless, in the hierarchy of literature, the novel was still

far below poetry, tragedy and the epic. "Fielding and Sterne could depict the boisterous and often bawdy goings-on below stairs, but poetry was for the drawing-room where all must be sedate and formal," Murray Roston tells us (60). And with the expansion of middle-class readers in the mid-eighteenth century and the growth of lower-class readers since the 1820s, the anxiety in the cultural élite about "Mob-readers" as active consumers of "cheap" writings who threatened the hegemony of higher-class culture only intensified. The cultural élite's overt tone of confidence had already weakened since the mid-eighteenth century.[13] Most of the true "mob" in the eighteenth century did not even read, but the use of the word belied the élite's fear -- "at the beginning of the Hanoverian period," George Woodcock has pointed out, "riots by Tory and even Jacobite mobs were common in London, preluding the rising of 1715" (13). To be sure, during the Romantic Period, the word "mob" had acquired even more dreadful connotations: "the Gordon riots, Priestley riots, food riots, Luddism, Peterloo, the Merthyr rising and the reform riots" (Harrison 315). During the 1790s, when Wordsworth and Southey were still "democrats" at heart, one need not question their sympathy, if paternalist and intellectual, for the lower ranks. But as far as literary taste was concerned, before the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth's poems were hardly

"levelling." Coleridge's Miltonic elevation had been well-known to his contemporary readers; even the "Ancyent Marinere" and "Christabel" are no broadside ballads but heirs to eighteenth-century antiquarianism.

The appeal to "refined" literary taste appeared in Augustanism primarily as an indicator of norms, a sign of the upper-class cultural hegemony. But it would be misleading to see its main function simply as to "discipline" middle-class or lower-class readers. More importantly, it is involved in the self-fashioning of the cultural élite, be it Tory or Whig. Greenblatt's notion of "authority" and "alien" are useful here for pinpointing a dialectical relationship. Greenblatt's best insight concerning self-fashioning is that selfhood does not necessarily imply particularity, "radical reflexivity" or "solipsism," notions endeared by Visionary Romanticism. Rather, the awareness of normalcy or "authority" is essential. Self-fashioning, as studied in Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, involves the internalization of a dialectic between "authority" and "alien." I shall not follow Greenblatt closely. Of the ten "observations" about Renaissance self-fashioning, I shall render below only those relevant to my own study and with modification and omission:

1. "Self-fashioning [sometimes] involves submission to an absolute power or authority situated at least partially

outside the self -- God, a sacred book, an institution such as [the] church..."

2. "Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other -- heretic, savage... traitor, Antichrist -- must be discovered or invented in order to be attacked and destroyed."

3. "One man's authority is another man's alien." (9)[14]

There had always been a literary "underworld" at least since the Elizabethan Age, vulgar writings as exemplified by chapbooks and broadsheets. The reason why the cultural élite since Pope and Addison had become apprehensive about vulgarity was precisely the rise of the middle class, from which, in fact, most of them had come. Popular novel, sensational drama and sentimental "Magazine-Poetry," unlike earlier "low" forms of writing, no longer confined themselves to an underworld which the élite could comfortably neglect. The middling "vulgar" writings were perceived as a threatening "alien" because they were accepted by the less refined middle-class audience, who were, nevertheless, recognized as an ascending social and economic power. In perceiving "Mob-readers" as a threatening Other and in emphatically exorcizing this "alien," the cultural élite did not necessarily suffer, in Greenblatt's words, "some loss of self" (9). Rather, it

might uplift itself and reassure itself that its difference was superiority, by defining itself as opposed to the low and vulgar. "Mob-Readers" may even, to borrow René Girard's word, serve as "scapegoats" to foster class or group solidarity. Obviously, whether and how much apprehension was consciously felt in the élite with respect to the "alien" is left unexplained in Greenblatt's dialectic, and it had more to do with self-confidence, with how it saw its readers and its own social values. Though of some initial value as an interpretive tool, Greenblatt's "observations" must not be taken out of their original context and considered as an absolute model. First, even within the simpler Augustan context, it fails to account for why and to what extent a poet felt alienated from the public. The mere hypothesis that "the power generated to attack the alien in the name of the authority is always produced in excess and threatens the authority it sets out to defend [and hence] self-fashioning always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining..." (9) will not do. Secondly, after the bourgeois "sentimental revolution" and the French Revolution, what was to be taken as "authority" and "alien" must be more precarious and less determinant. For the Romantics, the terms for "authority" and "alien" might well include radicalism, nature, God, the Anglican Church, Britannia, Milton, poetic calling, conservatism, the

bourgeoisie, "Mob-readers," literary reviewers, the public, the market, Jacobinism, and so on and so forth. Wordsworth and Coleridge had been seen as "turn coats"; but their "apostasy" was not a simple and sudden conversion. Thematically and stylistically, the *Lyrical Ballads* was rather ambivalent in its ideological implications. So were Wordsworth's and Coleridge's political stances during the late 1890s and early 1800s. It was in the course of the 1800s that the supposed "levelling muse" in the "Lake Poets," especially in Wordsworth, had gradually been recognized and fiercely attacked by critics like Jeffrey, partly out of cultural snobbery and partly motivated by political sentiments. I shall take this up later. In the meantime, let me return to the Augustan Age and supplement my discussion of Romantic alienation in the previous chapter, qualifying Eagleton's interpretation in terms of writer-reader relationship. For Eagleton, there had been an intensification of social alienation in the writer from the Augustan Age to the Romantic Age due to the commodification of literature. In Samuel Johnson, an intermediate figure between Augustanism and Romanticism, one could already detect symptoms of alienation. Let me quote Eagleton's *The Function of Criticism* in some length:

> Johnson is both grandly generalizing sage and "proletarianized" hack; and it is the dialectical

> relation between these incongruous aspects of his work which is most striking. The social alienations of the latter can be found in displaced form in the involuted meditations of the former; and not only in displaced form, for one of Johnson's recurrent motifs is precisely the hazards and frustrations of authorship in a literary mode of production ruled by the commodity. Stripped of material security, the hack critic compensates for and avenges such ignominy in the sententious authority of his flamboyantly individualist style. Moralistic, melancholic and metaphysical, Johnson's writing addresses itself to the social world ... in the very moment of spurning it; he is, as Leslie Stephen notes, the moralist who "looks indeed at actual life, but stands well apart and knows many hours of melancholy." The sage has not yet been driven to renounce social reality altogether; but there are in Johnson ominous symptoms, for all his personal sociability, of a growing dissociation between the literary intellectual and the material mode of production he occupies. (32)

Not many critics, I suppose, would emphasize the "gloomy" and "melancholic" side of Johnson's *oeuvre*. Johnson's

melancholy could be partly explained by his false start, his marriage and the economic pressures he experienced as a professional writer.[15] What Eagleton has missed is an important ideological dimension not directly related to "the material mode of production" per se. Indeed, Eagleton's "ironic reading" of Johnson might well be pushed back in time and applied to Pope during the golden days of "subscription patronage." Commenting on Pope's confident, rational and public tone, J.R. Watson claims:

> It was, on the face of it, an insecurity that was tightly controlled; even in *The Dunciad*, Pope's grotesque imaginings are harnessed to the chariot of goodness and light. Yet the presence in the poem of extraordinary and grotesque language and imagery means that, as readers, we listen to a sound that is recognisably that of anguish and despair, of a soul in rage against the failures of the time. (9-10)

The perception of the "failures of the time" betrayed the aristocratic bias in the Augustan writers towards the "vulgar" "moneied people," the supporters of the Whig. Ideologically, some Augustan writers were close to the Country Opposition to the rising bourgeoise. As Kramnick argues convincingly in *Bolingbroke and His Circle*, Viscount Bolingbroke, Pope, Swift, Gay and Lord Lyttleton, the patron

of James Thomson,

> as a group, shared common values on social and political questions. Their bias was traditional and Tory, idealizing an aristocratic and gentry society. To the extent they sensed this society's decline, they responded with gloom, ridicule, satire, and misanthropy. Some found outlets in chauvinism, others in the political thought of reaction. Dominating their individual expressions was a common alienation from the age. (205)

As the last Augustan who had witnessed, to borrow J.H. Plumb's words, "the prevalence of bitter and anti-monarchical, pro-republican sentiment of the 1760's and 1770's" (14), Johnson must have experienced even more intensely than Pope the "alienation from the age." Despite their objection to the neo-Classical style and their generally more liberal thoughts, the Romantics like Wordsworth were soul-mates of the Augustans in their aversion to "vulgarity" of popular bourgeois literature and, to some extent, their active consumers, namely, the uncultivated bourgeoisie. In the 1800 preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth laments that "a multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce

it to a state of almost savage torpor" (*Lyrical Ballads* 150-60). The worst of these "aliens," for Wordsworth, were "the great national events which are daily taking place, and the encreasing [sic] accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies" (160). Apart from the war, all these "most effective causes" responsible for the deterioration of literary taste, in the last analysis, were related to the rise of the middle class. As Leftists like Raymond Williams and Michael Friedman have noted, Romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge were active critics of capitalism. Interestingly, though Pope was Wordsworth's arch-enemy in terms of literary taste, they were secret allies in their "Country Opposition" to the "vulgar" bourgeosie. A reality the Romantics must reckon with, however, was that the rise of the middle class was in fact the main reason for the establishment of an independent profession of letters, without which "poetic calling" could only be castles in the air. Wordsworth could idealize the rustic life in the Lake District and sympathize, at least intellectually, with the Cumberland beggar or the female vagrant, but not the race of "faceless" shopkeepers nor the urban poor. The most striking description of the city in *The Prelude* is one of loss, of confusion and social

alienation:

> How often in the overflowing Streets,
> Have I gone forward with the Crowd, and said
> Unto myself, the face of every one
> That passes by me is a mystery.
> Thus have I look'd, nor ceas'd to look, oppress'd
> By thoughts of what, and whither, when and how,
> Until the shapes before my eyes became
> A second-sight procession, such as glides
> Over still mountains, or appears in dreams;
> And all the ballast of familiar life,
> The present, and the past; hope, fear; all stays,
> All laws of acting, thinking, speaking man
> Went from me, neither knowing me, nor known. (*1805 Prelude* 121-22, lines 595-607)

As Williams analyses it, "Wordsworth saw strangeness, a loss of connection, not at first in social but in perceptual ways; a failure of identity in the crowd of others which worked back to a loss of identity in the self, and then, in these ways, a loss of society in itself, its overcoming and replacement by a procession of images" (*Country and City* 150). Encountering the blind beggar, Wordsworth could not see him as a pathetic man of fresh and blood, but "a type /Or emblem" (lines 618-19) as if "[admonition] from another world" (lines 622-23). It is an irony that the famous "poet

of the human heart" could not even pity a poor man the way an honourable "man of Taste" in the "age of almsgiving" or even an unrefined Methodist would readily do. Hazlitt's and Jeffrey's questioning of Wordsworth's sincerity is not entirely groundless. Even though Wordsworth had zealously idealized the "low and rustic life," his image among those he wrote about was perhaps quite embarrassing. Canon H.D. Rawnsley had recorded a conversation with a low-born neighbour of Wordsworth's in 1870. Asked whether Wordsworth was a sociable man, the neighbour replied in a "language really used by men":

> Wudsworth,...for a' he had noa pride nor nowt, was a man who was quite one to hissel, ye kna. He was not a man as folks could crack [chat] wi', nor not a man as could crack wi' folks. But there was another thing as kep' folks off, he had a ter'ble girt deep voice... And he had a way of standin' quite still by the rock there in t'path under Rydal, and folks could hear sounds like a wild beast coming from the rocks, and childer were scared fit to be dead a'most..." (Hodgart and Redpath 226-27)

With respect to both poetry and personality, the neighbour compared Wordsworth unfavourably with Hartley Coleridge, the son of S.T. Coleridge:

> There's potry wi' a li'le bit pleasant in it, and potry sic as a man can laugh at or the childer understand, and some as takes a deal of mastery to make out what's said, and a deal of Wudsworth's was this sort, ye kna. You could tell fra the man's faace his potry was quite different work from li'le Hartley. Hartley'ud goa running along beside o'the brooks and mak his, and goa in the first oppen door and write what he had got upo'paper. But Wudsworth's potry was real hard stuff, and bided a deal of makking, and he'd keep it in his head for long enough. Eh, but it's queer, mon, different ways folks hes of making potry now. Folks goes a deal to see where he's interred; but for my part I'd walk twice distance over Fells to see where Hartley lies. Not but what Mr Wudsworth didn't stand very high, and was a well-spoken man enough, but quite one to himself... (228)

A major point I would like to qualify in Eagleton is that: a writer will feel alienated from his readers if he or she is at odds with them with respect to class identity, political sentiments or literary taste. And this sense of alienation has no direct relation to what Williams calls "liabilities to caprice" in the market or Eagleton calls "increasingly

anonymous, commodified literary production" (31). In the days of Addison and Pope, although the population of England and Wales was over 5,500,000, the active readers were restricted to a few thousands, and the aspiring middle-class readers were willing to be guided by the classically educated minority. Under such circumstances, the conception of a dissociation between the writer and the general reading public was not yet apparent. Though a Catholic, Pope might be considered, Leslie Stephen argues, "as the authorized interpreter of the upper circle, which then took itself to embody the highest cultivation of the nation" (65). Addison and Steele were more fortunate, for as successful, cultivated middle-class men they had climbed the social ladder apparently untroubled by any guilty sense of "middle-class consciousness"; themselves Whigs, nor were they unhappy about the "Whig supremacy." In the case of the "Bolingbroke circle," however, a sense of alienation was already felt, for no matter how proud they were of their cultural superiority and no matter how sure they were of their political views, these élites were frustrated by what they saw as "the failures of the time."

Commenting on the "birth of the nineteenth-century 'sage'" as exemplified by Coleridge and Carlyle, Eagleton made an interesting point: "The sage is no longer the co-discoursing equal of his readership, his perceptions

tempered by a quick sense of their common opinion; the critic's stance in relation to his audience is now transcendental, his pronouncements dogmatic and self-validating, his posture towards social life chillingly negative" (40). And Eagleton attributes the cause to "the commercialization of literary production and the political imperative to process public consciousness in an age of violent class conflict" (39). I would only agree with the second part of the explanation. Besides, the "sages" were few and could hardly represent general conditions of professional writers. That the "sage" felt alienated depends not so much on commercialization as on his élitist attitude, the self-willed assertion of his difference in sentiments and taste from the reading public, and on the degree of his self-confidence. The predicament, to borrow Walter Jackson Bate's words, was "a *psychological* imposition" (88), and it was already somehow prefigured by Pope and Johnson.

Chapter Four

Wordsworth's and Coleridge's Early Poetry

Sensibility, Radicalism and Reception

I. Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and Wordsworth's Early Poetry

Although the *Lyrical Ballads* was not a best-seller compared with Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* or Byron's *Childe Harold*, it would be a gross exaggeration to suggest that the book was altogether unpopular and too bold for its time. Nor is it right to claim that the book suffered too much from criticism out of political and aesthetic biases. The *Lyrical Ballads* had run to three editions by 1802, the second and third editions being published by the respectable publisher Thomas Longman. The initial reception of the 1798 anonymous edition was slow, but Jeffrey, in his 1807 review of Wordsworth's *Poems, in Two Volumes*, can write that "The Lyrical Ballads were unquestionably popular; and, we have no hesitation in saying, deservedly popular" (Reiman A 2: 429).[1] And despite Hazlitt's claim that there was a "levelling" muse in the young Wordsworth, the greatest compliment to the "experiments" in the *Lyrical Ballads* came from a mouthpiece for the Tory establishement, the *Antijacobin Review*, in 1800. In a short notice the reviewer W. Heath gives the

following laudatory comments, which might well be mistaken to be a puff:

> It has genius, taste, elegance, wit, and imagery of the most beautiful kind. "The ancyent Marinere" is an admirable "imitation of the style as well as of the spirit of the elder poets." "The Foster Mother' Tale" is pathetic, and pleasing in the extreme -- "Simon Lee the old Huntsman" -- "The idiot Boy," and the Tale of "Goody Blake, and Harry Gill" are all beautiful in their kind; indeed the whole volume convinces us that the author possesses a mind at once classic and accomplished, and we, with pleasure, recommend it to the notice of our readers as a production of no ordinary merit. (Reiman A 1: 22)

In a 1798 notice of the *Lyrical Ballads* in *Monthly Mirror*, a journal targeted for cultivated readers, Wordsworth's critique of the "depraved taste" of "the pompous and high-sounding phraseology" was warmly approved (Reiman A 2: 685). The reviewer commends that the author "has produced sentiments of feeling and sensibility, expressed without affectation, and in the language of nature" (685). A review in the *British Critic*, a journal of Tory and High-Church bias, offers his "cordial approbation," affirming that "in general the author has succeeded in attaining that judicious

degree of simplicity, which accommodates itself with ease even to the sublime" (Reiman A 1: 128). Coleridge's "conversational poem" "The Nightingale" is likened to Cowper's *The Task*. And the reviewer concludes that there is not in the volume "any offensive mixture of enmity to present institutions, except in one or two instances, which are so unobtrusive as hardly to deserve notice" (130). John Stoddart in his 1801 review affirms Wordsworth's "judicious degree of simplicity in language" and totally agrees with Wordsworth that "the public taste" has been "misled by affected pomp and false glitter of language" (Reiman A 1: 132). One of the most disapproving reviews came from Southey, Coleridge's close friend.[2] Southey, himself a sensational balladist as exemplified by his "Poor Mary, the Maid of the Inn," criticizes "bald[ness] in story" in Wordsworth's ballads, and says that "many of the stanzas" in the "Ancient Mariner" "are laboriously beautiful; but in connection they are absurd or unintelligible" (Reiman A 1: 308). In a letter Southey describes Wordsworth's ballads as "nonsense" and Coleridge's "The Nightingale" as "tolerable" (Jackson 60). Jeffrey, on the contrary, writes in a letter in 1799 that he was "enchanted with" the *Lyrical Ballads* and that in the "Ancient Mariner" "there is more true poetical horror and more new images than in all the German ballads and tragedies, that have been holding our hair on end for

these last three years" (Jackson 60). The high appraisal by reviewers of conservative and aristocratic leanings supports Jacobus's subtle argument that Wordsworth and Coleridge's ballads are closely related to respectable eighteenth-century antiquarianism rather than to street ballads or fashionable German ballads of the day, intended for sophisticated readers rather than true members of "low and rustic life" or vulgar bourgeoisie thirsty for sensationalism. To better understand the Romantic ambivalence one must return to the eighteenth-century heritage of sensibility. Eighteenth-century Romanticism, or "Preromanticism," has alternatively been called, as proposed by Frye, an "age of sensibility." Unfortunately, the contradictions within sensibility have often been obscured and the different strains have been lumped together as "precursors" of Romanticism. A close scrutiny of sensibility is not my major concern. In what follows, I shall only attempt to outline those developments relevant to Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poetry.

"Sensibility" is a difficult word. "It is not a unitary idea," Chris Jones writes, "but an umbrella term covering a wide variety of ideas and attitudes" ("Radical Sensibility" 68). According to Ann Jessie Van Sant's recent study *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel* (1993), "the three principal contexts in which *sensibility* was a key

idea in the eighteenth century are physiology, epistemology, and psychology." Van Sant offers a general working definition of "sensibility" as:

> an organic sensitivity dependent on brain and nerves and underlying a) delicate moral and aesthetic perception; b) acuteness of feeling, both emotional and physical; and c) susceptibility to delicate passional arousal. Though belonging to all, greater degrees of delicacy of sensibility -- often to a point of fragility -- are characteristic of women and upper classes. (1)

We need not dwell on eighteenth-century physiological theories here. Suffice it to point out that such descriptions as the "vibrations of the heart" or of "heartstrings" simultaneous with a powerful emotional response, as one finds in Sterne, for example, had a physiological basis. Etymologically, before the mid-eighteenth century, "sensibility" was rarely used, and "delicacy" was usually used as its synonym. "Delicacy" is of course akin to "taste," denoting gentility or upper-class cultural superiority, as we have discussed in self-fashioning of the cultural élite. Recent historical studies tend to see eighteenth-century sensibility as a bourgeois cultural phenomenon, but as a matter of fact, it was aristocratic before it was democratized in the mid century.

As far as moral philosophy is concerned, the natural connection between sensibility and morality was first well formulated by the third Earl of Shaftesbury in *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711, 1714), and was further developed in such scholars as Francis Hutcheson, Lord Kames, David Hume, Adam Ferguson and Hugh Blair. Reacting against Calvinism and Hobbesian pessimism, Shaftesbury holds that "moral sense" is innate in man and that moral judgment is as spontaneous as the apprehension of beauty. Besides, "moral sense" or "moral sentiment" is associated with the "heart" or emotions. For the literary critic John Dennis, the head must be reformed by the heart and the Puritan interregnum was an impelling example showing the problem of passion oppressed by reason. "A Poet ... is oblig'd always to speak to the Heart," he insists (Morris 49). Poetry is "an Art, by which a Poet excites Passion" and "by the force of the Passion, instructs and reforms the reason" (48, 52). But as a whole, when eighteenth-century scholars and critics discussed sensibility, they had in mind primarily the upper-class or the small circle of cultural élites. Delicate feelings, like sublimity, were taken as privileges of the man or lady of "Taste," and not naturally found in "Mob-Readers," the "threatening Other." Although in Hume solitary meditation and rural retreat had given way to sociability, so that like Richardson and Sterne he was

"committed to the resources of a language of feeling for the purpose of representing social bonds," Hume "found his... model for the operation of 'humanity, generosity, beneficence,' in the associations of the educated and the enlightened in eighteenth-century Edinburgh" (Mullan 3). For some physicians, even some forms of psychological "Malady" or "Distemper" were signs of unusual intelligence and psychic refinement. "Melancholy" is a word cherished by many "Preromantic" and Romantic poets. It is noteworthy that, according to Robert James' *A Medicinal Dictionary* (1743-45), "more frequently, ingenious Men, Poets, Philosophers, and those charmed with the more deep and abstruse Parts of Mathematics and Algebra, are subject to Melancholy" (Mullan 209). Along side the more cosmopolitan and rational "Augustan" tradition, there was also a marked "Preromantic" "country tradition" of solitary meditation and rural retreat which had become more prominent after the mid-eighteenth century. Often written by aristocrats, clergymen, scholars or "private gentlemen," the "country tradition" included such poets as the Countess of Winchilsea, Edward Young, Thomas Gray, the Wartons, William Collins, William Cowper, James Thomson, and Thomas Gray. Their meditative, melancholic and nature poetry, like Joseph Warton's *The Enthusiast* (1744), Young's *Night-Thoughts* (1742-46), and Thomson's *Seasons*, though rich in delicate

sentiments, is aloof from sentimental domestic fiction, sexualized Gothic fiction and sensational "Magazine-Poetry" beloved by many middle-class readers. Lyricism in Wordsworth and Coleridge is no doubt an inheritance of eighteenth-century genteel sensibility. In his "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" to *Poems* (1815), Wordsworth uses the phrase "the delicacy of the feelings," mentions Shaftesbury as "an author at present unjustly depreciated," highly praises Countess of Winchilsea's "A Nocturnal Reverie," and claims Thomson's *Seasons* as "the overflowings of a tender benevolent heart" (*Wordsworth* 747). In the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth defines a poet as one "being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility" (*Wordsworth* 735). In the preface to *Poems* (1815), he sees sensibility as one of "the powers requisite for the production of poetry" (*Wordsworth* 752). Discussing the six kinds of poetry, he cites Young's *Night Thoughts* and Cowper's *The Task* as a composite of the "Idyllium," "Didactic" and "philosophical Satire," apparently approvingly (*Wordsworth* 752-53). "The Nocturnal Reverie" is a lady's solitary meditation of the waste of life coloured by a mild melancholy. While indulging in her nocturnal "silent musings" (line 41), she laments that she could only "abroad remain, /Till morning breaks, and all's confused again: Our cares, our toils, our clamours are renewed, /Or

pleasures, seldom reached, again pursued" (lines 47-50, Whitney et al 156). Like many other eighteenth-century poems of "pensive solitude" and "sweet melancholy," Countess of Wichilsea's "Reverie" is lyrical, and there is no pathetic scenes, no tear-jerking, and no social protest. Within this refined "Preromantic" tradition, the sentimental lady or gentleman, confined to the *hortus conclusus* or his or her own chamber, contemplated no Cumberland beggar or female vagrant. The more religious poetry of the "Graveyard School" is similar in this respect. In "Night 1" of his *Night Thoughts* (1742), for example, Young follows the manuals of devotion to meditate in retirement on the great truths of Christianity and manages to console himself. No critic would accuse him of "egotism," for the theme and sentiments are Christian commonplaces. He summons "Silence and Darkness" as his Muses. Morbidity, even if indulgent, is subordinated to the dialectic of doubt and devotion, based ultimately on the humble admission of the elusiveness of *gloria mundi* and of God's design beyond human comprehension. "Helpless immortal! insect infinite! /A worm! a god! -- I tremble at myself, /And in myself am lost!" So he desperately cries (lines 79-81, Whitney et al 513). While Robert Blair ends "The Grave" by the promise of ressurrection, Young turns to the conventional theme of immortality through poetry "to lull [his] griefs, and steal

[his] heart from woe!" (line 447, Whitney et al 520). Graveyard poetry is "sentimental," in the sense of solitary meditation and indulgence in melancholy. But however "egocentric," it does not appear to be "egotistic," for neither the sentiments are too "sickly" or offending, nor are the subjects of contemplation without some universal appeal. The Augustan adherence to universality and to God as the chief "authority" did not imply that there was no sense of selfhood or no will to self-aggrandizement. Commenting on the poetry of religious sublime, Roston has written that the "sense of humility before the Supreme Creator which pervades all biblical poetry contrasts vividly with the graceful self-assurance of the eighteenth-century poet," who is "conscious of the dignity befitting a rational creature" (28). Although Wordsworth admired the genteel tradition of sensibility and sublimity, in replacing the cultivated "man of Taste" by a pedlar or a waggoner or in clothing "the most insignificant things" with excessive "borrowed grandeur" (Reiman A 2: 528) or "morbid feelings" (Hazlitt 5: 53), he had irritated some of his contemporary readers as an "egotist." But however "experimental" Wordsworth's and Coleridge's poems might be, as I shall argue, they are not indisputably "levelling."

Before I turn to the notion of "radical sensibility," let me briefly discuss the democratization of sensibility

since the mid-eighteenth century. Unlike the more restrained and lofty genteel poetry of "pensive solitude," "the novel of sentiment of the 1740s and 1750s praises a generous heart and often delays the narrative to philosophize about benevolence; the novel of sensibility, increasingly written from the 1760s onwards, differs slightly in emphasis since it honours above all the capacity for refined feeling," so Janet Todd writes in her study of sensibility (8). The so-called "sentimental revolution" of the 1760s and 1770s was a broad bourgeois cultural movement. After the sentimental novel popularized by Richardson, Fielding and Smollett, and enhanced by evangelicalism, sensibility was no longer the exclusive symbol of social distinction for the aristocratic man or lady of taste, no longer confined to the *hortus conclusus*. Rousseau and Sterne were two of the most important literary figures responsible for the "cult of sensibility." Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-67), with whimsical characters and sensational humours verging on obscenity, found a large readership. Rousseau's *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloise,* translated into English in 1761, caused a sensation. The notion of natural benevolence associated with sensibility developed by Shaftesbury is also found in Rousseau. "Emotional extravagance," Paul Langford argues, "became a requirement of fashionable worshippers at this new shrine"

(463). In France, the cult of sensibility continued after the death of Rousseau. The visit to his grave in Ermenonville was popular among sensitive young men. In England since the mid-eighteenth century, the sentimental vogue was no longer limited to literature. The emotional Christianity of Methodism fostered pity for the victim and the underprivileged. Philanthropic projects like Magdalen House and the Philanthropic Society, on the other hand, deliberately drew public attention to the pathetic conditions of the poor in order to plead for sympathetic support. The bourgeois "sentimental revolution" corresponded to an "age of benevolence," of "charity" or of "almsgiving" as it was variously called at that time. "Sentiment," Langford explains,

> had a special appeal to middle-class England at a time of economic growth and rising standards of living. Gentility was the most prized possession of all in a society obsessed with the pursuit of property and wealth. It could be purchased, but only if the code of genteel conduct was sufficiently flexible to fit the diverse social and educational circumstances of the purchasers. The emphasis on feeling provided this flexibility and removed the sense of repressive social exclusiveness which marked a more aristocratic

> view of the world... In this the morality of the new sentiment played an important part. Its function was clearly displayed in the attack on outmoded concepts of gentlemanly honour. (464)

Besides, sensibility was closely related to the urge for social reforms. Langford adds:

> Its most beneficial consequence was thought to be a heightened sensitivity to the social and moral problems brought by economic change. A new age of philanthropy was born... Parliament found itself at the centre of an increasingly open debate about the proper direction of social policy. However, progress with institutional change was slow... Yet there was a surge of interest in charitable activity, much of it devoted to the discipline as well as the relief of the labouring poor. "Sensibility" found diverse and suitable objects of appeal in children, animals, and non-European peoples. (461-62)

Once sensibility was democratized, it had lost its symbolic value as a sign of upper-class refinement. In general, as far as literature was concerned, genteel sensibility of "pensive solitude" was more restrained, while bourgeois sensibility tended towards "tear-demanding exhibitions of pathos and unqualified virtue" (Todd 8). With the "cult of

sensibility" found everywhere in the popular novel and "Magazine-Poetry," the distinction between genteel and bourgeois sensibility was blurred. The cultivated reader began to question the "vulgar" writer's sincerity and criticize the "excess." Furthermore, the rise of Gothic fiction, "sickly and stupid German Tragedies" and "idle and extravagant stories in verse" brought forth the problem of obscenity. "Gothic fiction," Todd writes, "emerging in the 1760s but growing fashionable only in the 1790s, uses sentimental contrasts of virtue and vice or malignancy and distressed worth, but goes far towards sensationalizing and often sexualizing these elements, while it retreats from the didactic aim of sentimental literature" (9). Hence sensibility found its opponents since the late eighteenth century. A survey of how the term had been qualified can tell us something about this change. In Addison, sensibility was "exquisite," in Hume "delicate," in Cowper "sweet," in Sterne "dear," but in Jane Austen it already became "acute," in Hazlitt "trembling," in Coleridge "mawkish" and in Byron "sickly" (Todd 7). Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" (1770) and Crabbe's *The Village* (1783) may be seen as two early instances of literary reaction against bourgeois sentimentalism. Goldsmith's poem is a critique of agrarian capitalism, based upon, he said, his country excursions during four to five years. Basically a pastoral

in its idealization of his youthful days in "sweet Auburn" with "Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease" (line 5), and sentimental in his expression of love for all the rural charms. Unfortunately, "all these charms are fled" after the coming of "The Revolution in Low Life," when wealthy merchants purchased the land and drove out the peasants. The lamentation of lost and the longing for "Here to return -- and die at home at last," again, is sentimental as in earlier eighteenth-century poetry of rural retreat or melancholy. What is startlingly new, however, is the naked social protest against the "failures of the time." In his dedication to Sir Joshua Reynolds, Goldsmith had written of a wish to attack "the increase of luxuries," for he thinks that they are "prejudicial to states, by which so many vices are introduced, and so many kingdoms have been undone" (Goldsmith 4: 286). This is certainly not just another poem of "sweet melancholy" in a *hortus conclusus* or an inscription poem in the vein of William Shenstone. Crabbe's *The Village* was an anti-pastoral, a report, intended to be realistic, about the misery of the rural poor. The entire classic pastoral tradition was rejected in favour of social realism. His sympathy for the worn-out labourer and his family (Book I, 172-205) was noted by a reviewer of *Critical Review* who praised both the "language and sentiment" of the poem (Pollard 42). Another reviewer noted Crabbe's "good

sense": regardless of the description of the social problem, Crabbe acknowledges "that the poor have no reason to envy their superiors; that neither virtue nor vice, happiness nor misery, depend on either rank or station; that the peasant is frequently as vicious as the peer; and that the peer feels distress as poignantly as the peasant" (Pollard 43). Of course, Crabbe might not be as conservative as this critic had it, but understood in the convention of "conservative sensibility." Crabbe's poetry is politically safe. That perhaps helps us to understand why Crabbe still enjoyed popularity when, after an interregnum, in the more politically repressive year 1807 he published similar poems. But none of the major Romantics loved Crabbe, though some admired the beauty of Goldsmith's poetry. In a letter to Samuel Rogers, Wordsworth complains that "nineteen out of twenty of Crabbe's Pictures are mere matters of fact; with which the Muses have just about as much to do as they have with a Collection of medical reports, or of Law Cases" (Pollard 290). Coleridge comments in *Table Talk*: "In Crabbe there is an absolute defect of the high imagination; he gives me little or no pleasure ..." (Pollard 298).

Compared with the social protest and realism in Goldsmith and Crabbe, Wordsworth's two early works *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* are quite conventional in following some sentimental clichés. Towards the end of

"An Evening Walk," as dawn approaches, Wordsworth repeats the formula of genteel "sweet melancholy": "Stay! pensive, sadly-pleasing visions, stay!" (line 385) To conclude the poem, "Hope" is glorified and "The distant forge's swinging thump profound; /Or yell in the deep woods of lonely hound" (lines 445-46) brings the meditative "man of Taste" back to the mundane life of the day. The movement and sentiments in the later part of the poem are strikingly similar to Countess of Winchelsea's "A Nocturnal Reverie." And according to Gill, the "dynamic model of [interaction between] Man and Nature" (82) in this poem is much indebted to Mark Akenside's *The Pleasure of Imagination* (1744). The first review of Wordsworth's poem was found in the *Critical Review* in July 1793, which praises his "new and picturesque imagery." An appreciative notice was also found in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in 1794, in which the reviewer hopes that Wordsworth would be an heir to Gray. Although *The Evening Walk* is in line with the genteel sentimental tradition and was so received, there is an aspect of the poem not typical in Akenside, Gray or Collins. Apart from the indulgence in natural scenic beauties, Wordsworth also describes a pathetic female beggar. The sentimental interest in the deprived is of course heritage of the "age of benevolence," particularly manifested in the Dissenters and the evangelists. But instead of meditating on the

social conditions responsible for the woman's misery or detailing the unbearable face of social reality, the description about the death of the woman's children "Thy breast their death-bed, coffin'd in thine arms" (line 300, *Wordsworth* 467) is immediately followed by the line "Sweet are the sounds that mingle from afar" of the swans by the "clam lakes." What one finds here is a dramatic contrast intended for literary effects rather than serious social concern. Chris Jones is right in saying that "the poet of the 1793 *Evening Walk* is an onlooker, 'pensive' in the eighteenth-century sense, invoking only stereotyped responses, not the strong personal emotional reactions which move the poet to active thought" (*Radical Sensibility* 196). Wordsworth's handling of the beggar reminds us of E.P. Thompson's characterization of paternalism: "the interior life of the poor cannot be handled, unless with condescension or as picturesque" ("Disenchantment" 60).

Structurally, *Descriptive Sketches* is an imitation of Goldsmith's *The Traveller* (1794). Thomas Holcroft's 1793 review of the poem in *Monthly Review* is quite harsh, and his reaction against literary sentimentalism is conspicuously indicated by the beginning paragraph:

> More descriptive poetry! ... Have we not yet enough? Must eternal changes be rung on uplands and lowlands, and forests, and brooding clouds,

> and cells, and dells, and dingles? Yes; more, and yet more: so it is decreed. (Reiman A 2: 704-05)

Like some other critics, Holcroft finds faults with Wordsworth's unnatural diction and figure. More remarkably, he questions the authenticity of Wordsworth's sentiments as expressed in *Descriptive Sketches*. Holcroft summarizes lines 13 to 28 as follows:

> The flowers, though they have lost themselves, or are lost, exhale their idle sweets for him; the *spire peeps* for him; sod-seats, forests, clouds, nature's charities, and babbling brooks, all are to him luxury and friendship. He is the happiest of mortals, and plods, is forlorn, and has a wounded heart. (Reiman A 2: 705)

The paraphrase is meant to deride Wordsworth's emotional extravagance. "How often shall we in vain advise those, who are so delighted with their own thoughts that they cannot forbear from putting them into [rhyme], to examine those thoughts till they themselves understand them?" Holcroft complains. It is worth noting that the charges of artificiality and senselessness here are similar to those Wordsworth later indicted against Dryden and Pope.

As his unpublished "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff" and his letters to Mathews have shown, Wordsworth was most radical during the period 1793-94. Signed a "republican,"

Wordsworth in "Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff" defends regicide, opposes "hereditary authority" and even supports "the system of universal representation... the suffrage of every individual" (*Prose* 37). The unpublished "A Night on Salisbury Plain" (1793-94) is a protest poem much more radical than Goldsmith's, in which Wordsworth details "The pains and plagues that on our heads came down, /Disease and Famine, Agony and Fear" (lines 316-17, *Salisbury Plain* 31) and ends with the radical cry: "Heroes of Truth pursue your march, uptear /Th'Oppressor's dungeon from its deepest base... till not a trace /Be left on earth of Superstition's reign, /Save that eternal pile which frowns on Sarum's plain" (lines 541-49, *Salisbury Plain* 38). Stylistically, written in elegant Spenserian stanzas with a sentimental tone, the poem is, however, more traditional than Crabbe's matter-of-fact social realism. And when the poem appeared in the *Lyrical Ballads* as "The Female Vagrant," the voice of protest had already been edited out. "The Last of the Flock" is another poem in the same volume about the poor, and as Charles Burney remarks in *Monthly Review*: "No oppression is pointed out; nor are any means suggested for [the protagonist's] relief" (Reiman A 2: 715). The *Lyrical Ballads* is marked by a profound ambivalence: although its affinity to eighteenth-century genteel sensibility is unmistakable, the "commitment to the everyday" and the

interest in "low and rustic life," on the other hand, suggests a "levelling" muse.

II. "Radical Sensibility"? -- Radicalism and the Reception of Coleridge's Early Poetry

Given that sensibility is not a uniform or unitary concept, it could be progressive or conservative in ideological implications depending on its associations. An important social background of the eighteenth-century "sentimental revolution" was the rise and development of radicalism. In the late 1760s English radicalism was revived and gained substantial support from Dissenters in the course of the American War of Independence (1775-83). The petitioning movement was led by John Wilkes and later followed by the Association Movement. Progressive societies like the Society of the Supporters of the Bill of Rights and the Society for Constitutional Information were formed. With the rapid recovery of economic and political orders after the American war, however, support for the radicals and the cause of parliamentary reform diminished and it was not revitalized till the late 1780s under the French influence. Sensibility in the sense of sympathy for the poor certainly connoted liberality but not necessarily support for the rights of man. Associated with

evangelicalism, especially after Britain and France went to war, sensibility was conservative in its emphasis on supporting constituted authority. Edmund Burke, likewise, appealed to sensibility, not to excessive or self-indulgent feelings but love of the hearth as the foundation for loyalty to Nation and Church. But during the French Revolution, William Godwin in his *Political Justice* (1793) attacked narrow or partial affections and opted for rational control. Most radically, he saw gratitude as an evil for he believed that gratitude fostered slavish dependence and led to unequal institution. He also attacked family loyalties in the same fashion. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge were critical of Godwin's rationalism. "Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree," collected in the *Lyrical Ballads*, is an example showing Wordsworth's reaction against Godwinian rationalism according to de Selincourt's reading. We must note, though, Godwin did not object to sensibility per se, but only as it hindered universal benevolence. Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), on the other hand, tried "to redefine the terms of conservative sensibility, like delicacy, chastity, and modesty, in ways which suggest equality, self-respect, and independence, rather than following the code of feminine propriety, and in ways which are applicable to men as well" (Jones, *Radical Sensibility* 106). In the popular

sentimental novel, sensibility lagged behind radicalism. In works like Henry Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1771), as Jones puts it, "the author largely eschews social criticism to focus on the virtuous resignation of the Griselda-like heroine as she displays the Christian and specifically female virtue of passive fortitude" ("Radical Sensibility in the 1790s" 72). Sternes's sentimental novel is not quite like this feminine, domestic model. Yet, as in Methodism, there is no radical questioning of Providence, no attempt to break off from the "great chain of being." "The common anti-Jacobin narrative paradigm" of such writers as Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen, Jones argues, "aligns sensibility with selfishness, sees the cultivation of an enthusiastic aesthetic taste as self-indulgent, and deep sympathetic emotions as dangerous" (16). Jones' *Radical Sensibility* (1993) is a recent study of the literature and ideas in the 1790s which traces the theory of sensibility from Shaftesbury, through Burke, Hutcheson, Hume, Lord Kames and Adam Smith to Godwin and Wollstonecraft, and discusses the various meanings of sensibility in the writings, novels mainly, of the 1790s. Let me quote the summary paragraph from his related article "Radical Sensibility in the 1790s":

> The divisions within Sensibility were sites of conflict before the French Revolution, but they split the movement apart in the 1790s. At least

> three aspects of Sensibility were distinguished by contemporary writers. Self-centred emotional indulgence in "fine feelings" was attacked by all parties. A conservative Sensibility claimed that man's feelings were fostered by the associations of traditional society and were its principal support. A radical Sensibility continued to trust to innate emotional response to provide the basis of a beneficial social order, and embraced a philosophy which proposed to liberate individual energies. It espoused the libertarian ideals of the Revolution, and continued to use the terms of Sensibility to criticize British institutions. (69)

For all the lucid account of sensibility in Jones' book, the phrases "radical Sensibility" and "conservative Sensibility" do cause unnecessary confusion. Moreover, Jones has neglected the difference between "genteel sensibility" and "vulgar bourgeois sensibility." Since Jones approaches the issue by way of moral philosophy, he is much obsessed with the opposition between "benevolism" and "egoism," and for him radicalness primarily refers to whether sensibility is naturally benevolent or is fundamentally selfish and needs rational control. But "radical sensibility" in this sense, one must note, does not always go with a radical politics or

literary taste. Wordsworth's allegiance to benevolism is beyond doubt, and yet none of his published works are overtly radical in political sentiments. "Peter Bell," for example, already begun in 1798 and published in 1819, is obviously conformist in its Methodist conversion-narrative, and that is why Shelley parodies it by his satire "Peter Bell the Third." Jones' claim that "Wordsworth struggled to maintain the faith which had inspired him in France, a faith in social progress supported by a trust in human sensibility" (*Radical Sensibility* 217) is simplistic and even misleading, for benevolism, as Jones knows well, is an indigenous eighteenth-century tradition already there before Rousseau and his radical followers. Besides, the later Wordsworth as a "Tory humanist" was, as Gill reminds us, "deeply troubled by Catholic emancipation and by the reform agitation of the 1830s and 1840s" (Introduction xxiv). There was, one may as well argue, a continuity between the "conservative sensibility" in "Peter Bell" and Wordsworth's aim announced in the "Prelude" to *Poems* (1842) to awaken "Kindly emotion tending to console /And reconcile" at a time "When unforeseen distress spreads far and wide /Among a People mournfully cast down" during the "hungry forties" (*Poetical Works* 4: 177). If in the 1790s one of Wordsworth's dislikes is the vulgarity of "Mob-Readers," after 1820s his greater "alien" is the mob. The best lesson

we may learn from Jones' *Radical Sensibility* is perhaps not that there were "varieties of sensibility" but that the ideological implications of sensibility in writers like the early Wordsworth was deeply ambivalent and was open to contradictory interpretations. Hazlitt saw Wordsworth's Muse as "a levelling one... distinguished by a proud humility" and attributes Wordsworth's "new system of poetry" to radical thoughts associated with the French Revolution (11: 86, 87). In terms of literary taste, Wordsworth's "affirmation of the everyday," his commitment to represent the lower orders, is all along more radical than all other Romantics, including the politically more radical Shelley and Byron. Of course, some of Wordsworth's poems after the *Lyrical Ballads*, though still committed to the everyday, are more elevated and egotistical, which earned him some notoriety. The word "egotism" brings us back to the question of its precise meaning -- how should it be understood in terms of selfhood and social relations? I shall elaborate on it in the last two chapters. For the moment, I shall turn to Coleridge's public image as a radical and the reception of his poetry during the 1790s and early 1800s.

Despite his own worry about "querulous egotism" in the preface to his *Poems* (1796), as we have already discussed earlier, Coleridge, like Wordsworth, did not suffer from the

charge of egotism during the 1790s. In the later years, Coleridge remained much less liable to the charge of egotism. To be egotistical, in one sense, is to be too different in taste or sentiments from the general public, as I have suggested. One major reason why Coleridge's poetry was warmly accepted was that his literary taste, in fact, was not strikingly new and not offensive even to the more conservative readers. In theory the young Coleridge shared Wordsworth's reaction against neo-Classicism and vulgar sensibility, but in practice most of his early poems were not particularly "levelling," at least not perceived by his contemporary readers as such. Instead, his lofty and figurative style and great poetic passions were generally recognized and acclaimed.

On "Religious Musing" collected in *Poems* (1796), John Aikin asserts in the *Monthly Review* that: "Often obscure, uncouth, and verging to extravagance, but generally striking and impressive to a supreme degree, it exhibits that ungoverned career of fancy and feeling which equally belongs to the poet and the enthusiast" (A 2: 708). A notice in the *Critical Review* about the same volume reads: "Mr. Coleridge... certainly possesses a fine invention, and a lively imagination, that enthusiastic love of liberty, which give energy to poetic composition, and force the reader into immediate admiration" (A 1: 302). While finding fault with

Coleridge's "frequent use of compound epithets" in the volume, a reviewer in the *Analytical Review* writes that "the general character of the composition is rather that of splendour than of simplicity; and the reader is left more strongly impressed with an idea of the strength of the writer's genius, than of the correctness of his taste" (Reiman A 1: 6). Even the Tory *British Critic* acknowledges that "this collection is marked by tenderness of sentiment, and elegance of expression" (Reiman A 1: 126). On the third edition (1803), one finds the following comment in the *Annual Review*: "Novel and picturesque personification, sometimes almost expanding into allegory, forms perhaps the most prominent and most beautiful feature of the highly figurative style of Mr. Coleridge" (Reiman A 1: 12).

In 1794, Coleridge had already published some sonnets on eminent characters in the *Morning Chronicle*. In these sonnets Coleridge criticized Edmund Burke for "[drinking Corruption's bowl," regretted the Younger Pitt's "foul [apostasy] from his Father's fame," lamented Priestley's exile, praised Thomas Erskine's defence of "British Freedom," and chanted that "Thou, FAYETTE! who didst wake with startling voice /Life's better sun from that long wintry night" (*Poems* 35-39). And Coleridge had collaborated with Southey in writing "The Fall of Robespierre," which was published in 1794 under Coleridge's name only. The poem

celebrated Robespierre's fall as a "self-will'd dictator," but still believed in "the almighty people" and that "Sublime amid the storm shall France arise" (*Poetical Works* 2: 515, 516). But it was his 1795 lectures on politics and religion, rather than his poetry, that first made Coleridge a famous public figure. In Bristol he mixed with the radicals and Nonconformists, especially the Unitarians. In his lectures he attacked the slave trade, opposed the war with France, criticized Pitt's domestic policies, and defended the Christian faith against atheism in radicals like Godwin. In fact, Coleridge was no extremist, but there was some waywardness in his radicalism. As John Colmer observes, "though he never at any time advocated a system of universal franchise, he spoke on the reform side and occasionally lapsed into slightly Jacobinical language" (23). And "the consciously superior tone that he adopted for much of the time was little calculated to win the sympathies of his audience, and the passages that he threw in either to amuse, or to satisfy the demand for sensationalism, struck a discordant note" (30). His 1796 private journal the *Watchman* was a failure. A ring of heresy in his essay on fasts, for instance, had repelled a number of his Christian readers. Elsewhere he had also displeased some of his democratic readers. After ten issues he gave up. To John Thelwal he wrote: "I am not fit for

public life" (*Collected Letters* 1: 277). Being a somewhat uneasy radical and, later in the 1790s, an ambivalent one, Coleridge must be well aware of his difference from the general public, which was liable to the charge of eccentricity or "querulous egotism." A 1798 notice in the *Monthly Visitor* says that "the Public are already acquainted with the prolific and eccentric genius of Mr. Coleridge" (Reiman A 2: 777). But the failure of his early politics did not prevent the rise of his poetic fame. His notoriety as a radical perhaps even helped the reception of his poetry. One must note that during the 1790s cultivated readers could still tolerate ideological differences. In a sense, sublimity transcends politics, as in the reception of Milton.

Coleridge's "Fears in Solitude" (1798) is embarrassing in its political sentiments. On the one hand, Coleridge denounces "a mad idolatry" in the Frenchmen, censures the French invasion of Switzerland, and fears a French invasion; on the other hand, he criticizes British imperialism corruption, atheism, and immorality. To extricate himself from the morass, he concludes the poem with the appeal to domestic love, to return to the "green and silent dell" where "my babe/ And my babe's mother dwell in peace!" (*Poems* 220). A notice in the *Monthly Mirror* on the volume announces Coleridge's "apostasy" rather than his

ambivalence:

> The political sentiments of Mr. Coleridge are well known; he is no friend to the present system of government. Lately he was an advocate for the French, but their recent conduct has effected an alternation in his opinions. (Reiman A 2: 686)

The reviewer of the Tory *British Critic* dismisses Coleridge's criticism of the British society, but pardons it "as the hasty emotion of a young man." "Frost at Midnight," collected in the same volume, is noted for "not being defaced by any of these absurdities" and praised for its "expressive tenderness" (Reiman A 1: 127). The francophile *Critical Review* blames him for being an "alarmist" and questions that his use of the word "Liberty" has diverged from the "subject of civil freedom" (Reiman A 1: 311, 312). Still, both "Fears in Solitude" and "Frost at Midnight" are admired for their beauty. Indeed, all through the 1790s, the critical reception of Coleridge's poetry was generally very positive, though the "Ancient Mariner" was rejected by some for its archaism in diction and obscurity in meaning. But poetic reputation did not mean immediate financial success. In 1796, Dr. John Aikin advised the readers in his review of *Poems* that: "The lover of poetry may be assured that much remains to repay his purchase; and we presume that he will not be less satisfied with his bargain, if, while it

contributes to his own pleasure, it tends to disperse the clouds which have darkened the prospects of a man of distinguished worth as well as of uncommon abilities" (Reiman A 2: 708-09). For years, "bread and cheese" had been one source of Coleridge's anxiety. In spite of his Miltonic aspiration, Coleridge had come to know very well that publishing poetry alone could not earn him a living. In 1806, the *Poetical Register* stated that "among the poets of the present day Mr. Coleridge holds a distinguished place," and few would disagree. However, a few years ago Coleridge had already complained that his muse had left him. And Jeffrey's 1802 review of Southey's *Thalaba* had inaugurated the war against the "Lake Poets," which continued into the 1810s and was joined by other critics like Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt. Literary reviews were no longer just a matter of taste but complicated by political motivations. And the love-hate relationship between the "Lake Poets" and the younger radicals came to the fore. The greatest sufferer was neither Coleridge nor Southey but Wordsworth, whose *Poems* (1807) earned him the public image of "egotism," against which he had to try very hard to fight. In the next chapter, I shall detail the reception of *Poems* (1807) and explain why Wordsworth had come to be seen as a notorious "egotist."

CHAPTER FIVE

Egotism Established: The Reception of Wordsworth's *Poems* (1807) and the General Attack on the "Lake School"

I. Wordsworth as an "Egotist": *Poems* (1807) Under Fire

By 1805, having completed the thirteen-book *Prelude*, which detailed the "growth of a poet's mind," Wordsworth must have been absolutely convinced of his "poetic calling."[1] Since 1798 Wordsworth had decided that his poetic accomplishment would be a great "philosophic" poem about "nature, man and society," to be entitled "The Recluse." In an unpublished advertisement for his *Poems, in Two Volumes*, Wordsworth says that he is in "the progress of a work of length and labour." And as he cannot "even guess when" his "larger work" will be completed, he publishes his shorter pieces first, and hopes that "they may afford profitable pleasure to many readers" (*1807 Poems* 145).[2] But the motto prefixed to the volumes promises something great to come: "*Posterius graviore sono tibi Musa loquetur*" (Hereafter, at better opportunity, our muse shall speak to you in a more impressive tone). Unfortunately, when his *Poems* came out in 1807, chilly reception immediately shattered Wordsworth's dream of attaining Miltonic success. Until 1814, 230 of the 1,000 copies of *Poems* (1807) were

still unsold. In a letter to Sir George Beaumont, dated January or February 1808, Wordsworth laments that "no Poem of mine will ever be popular" and, instead of reproaching himself, he puts the blame on "the sickly taste of the public in verse" (Hodgart and Redpath 181). These comments foreshadow Wordsworth's famous complaints about the critics and the public in "Essays Supplementary to the Preface" to *Poems* (1815). The impression of *Poems* (1807) as "a silly book ... written by a man of sense" (Reiman A 1: 312) was so widespread that one could hardly attribute it to the malicious will of any individual critics. Nor could we see contemporary criticism as monopolized by just a few villains, or, to borrow Donald Reiman's words, "literary reactionaries," who simply regressed to "Augustan" standards. There must be something in Wordsworth's *Poems* (1807) which deeply troubled most of his contemporary critics. In analysing its reception, I shall demonstrate how Wordsworth had come to be known as an arch "egotist."

Against the common mistake that the *Lyrical Ballads* was unwelcome, I must stress that it is Wordsworth's *Poems* (1807), not any of the three editions of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798, 1800, 1802), that met with almost unanimous hostile criticism. James Montgomery's review of *Poems* in the *Eclectic Review* begins with the statement: "In this age of poetical experiment, Mr. Wordsworth has distinguished

himself, by his 'Lyrical Ballads,' as one of the boldest and most fortunate adventurers in the field of innovation" (Reiman A 1: 333). Jeffrey, the severest critic of Wordsworth, acknowledged that the "lyrical ballads" "were undoubtedly characterised by a strong spirit of originality, of pathos, and natural feeling; and recommended to all good minds by the clear impression which they bore of the amiable dispositions and virtuous principles of the author" (A 2: 429). In his review of *Poems* in *Monthly Literary Recreation* Byron reminds the reader that the *Lyrical Ballads* "has not undeservedly met with a considerable share of public applause" (A 2: 661). It is therefore not surprising that in the front page of *Poems*, one finds under Wordsworth's name the brief introduction "author of the *Lyrical Ballads*," instead of, as in his earlier publications, "B.A. of St. John's, Cambridge." Only Lucy Aikin claimed that she "do[es] not perceive that [Wordsworth's] style of writing has since [the *Lyrical Ballads*] undergone any material alteration" (Reiman A 1: 13). Most critics felt strongly that *Poems* indicated a regrettable deterioration of Wordsworth's poetry. Byron ends his review with the following claim: "Many, with inferior abilities, have acquired a loftier seat on Parnassus, merely by attempting strains in which Mr. W. is more qualified to excel" (A 2: 662). Jeffrey expresses his regret that Wordsworth, "the

author of the bad verses[,] ... can write good verses when he pleases" (A 2: 436). And a notice in the *Poetical Register* reads: "The drivelling nonsense of some of Mr. Wordsworth's poems is insufferable, and it is equally insufferable that such nonsense should have been written by a man capable, as he is, of writing well" (A 2: 816).

Although most critics appreciated the *Lyrical Ballads*, some found faults with Wordsworth's views on poetry and the poet as put forth in the preface. In reviewing Wordsworth's *Poems* (1807), most tried to refute what they saw as Wordsworth's "foolish theory" or "incomprehensible system of poetry." Aikin argues that Wordsworth's reaction against "poetic diction" is excessive. She suggests that "one great source of ... the errors of [Wordsworth] [is] his failing to observe the distinction between rhetorical and poetical diction; the former it is that offends; but in his blind zeal he confounds both under the same note of reprobation" (Reiman A 1: 16). She objects, with Wordsworth, to "that accumulation of idle epithets, frivolous circumstances, and pompous and abstract terms ... [and the] idle parade of fine words" (16). But she argues that "figures of speech, -- similes, metaphors, allusions, and the like" must be used in poetry. Similarly, Montgomery says that: "However we might admire and commend Mr. Wordsworth's ingenuity in the advancement and vindication of his theory of poetical

phraseology; and however we might agree with him, so far as his system would restrict the multitude of epithets that frequently render verse too heavy for endurance, -- we would certainly protest against the unqualified rejection of those embellishments of diction, suited to the elevation of enthusiastic thoughts equally above ordinary discourse and ordinary capacities, which essentially distinguish Poetry from Prose, and have been sanctioned by the successful usage of Bards in every age and nation, civilized or barbarous, on which the light of Song has shed its quickening, ennobling, and ameliorating beams" (A 1: 334). Citing the *Lyrical Ballads*, Montgomery points out that "when Mr. Wordsworth would 'present *ordinary* things in an *unusual* way, by casting over them a certain colouring of imagination,' he is compelled very frequently to resort to splendid, figurative, and amplifying language" (A 1: 335). In a sense, the criticism of Wordsworth's advocacy of poetic simplicity was beside the point, for he never really objected to figurative language per se. Rather, as I have argued in the previous chapter, he was reacting against neo-Classicism on the one hand, and sensational "Magazine Poetry" and German ballads on the other hand. In *Poems* (1807), there is a considerable portion of works which do not belong to what Jeffrey calls "vulgar ballads and plebeian nurseries" (A 2: 431), by which I refer to the sonnets, and such poems as "Resolution and

Independence" and the odes. "Sonnets dedicated to liberty," Miltonic in style, republican and patriotic in sentiments, were most warmly received. "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic" was praised by both Jeffrey and Montgomery. The sonnets "hold a severe and manly tone ... [and] bear strong traces of feeling and of thought, and convince us that on worthy subjects this man can write worthily," so Aikin remarks (A 1:19). For Jeffrey, "Mr. Wordsworth, when he writes sonnets, escapes... from the trammels of his own unfortunate system; and the consequence is, that his sonnets are as much superior to the greater part of his other poems, as Milton's sonnets are superior to his" (A 2: 437). For Montgomery, the sonnets, "in point of imagery and sentiment, are perhaps the most poetical of all these motley productions," though "they are exceedingly unequal, often obscure, and generally heavy on the motion of the verse" (A 1: 336). As for the ballads collected in *Poems*, evaluation varied. Wordsworth's reaction against sensational popular ballads, as Mary Jacobus has ably discussed with respect to the *Lyrical Ballads*, were not always noticed by his contemporary critics. Jeffrey was indeed more discriminating than other critics in this respect. In his review he shows his admiration for the Medievalist "Song, at the Feast of Brougham Castle," and he at least admits that the chivalrous legend on "The Horn of

Egremont Castle" is "tolerable." But pieces like "To the Small Celandine" have gone too far in its triviality that Jeffrey questions whether they are any better than "the ditties of our common song writers" like Ambrose Philips. The pathetic tale "The Affliction of Margaret--of--" was "common-place" to a reviewer of *le Beau Monde* (A 1: 42). Many of the ballads in *Poems* appeared to the critics as "bald" and "unmeaning." Many would agree with Montgomery's comment that "the stories in these volumes are generally inferior, both in subject and in handling, to those which Mr. Wordsworth formerly gave the public" (A 1: 336). Besides, Wordsworth had claimed in the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* that each of his poem has a "purpose," but many critics did not see any worthy purpose in *Poems* (1807). "Of the pieces now published he has said nothing: most of them seem to have been written *for* no purpose at all, and certainly *to* no good one" (A 1: 337), so ends Montgomery's review. Of course, whether the subject matter or incident is ordinary may not be a demerit. Wordsworth in the *Lyrical Ballads* had already demonstrated how, in a successful ballad, it could be "that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling" (*Wordsworth* 735).

The general impressions of "false taste and puerile conceit," "silliness and affectation" (A 1: 314, A 2: 433)

in *Poems* (1807) and of Wordsworth's "nauseous and nauseating sensibilities" (A 1: 314) were mainly due to the lyrical pieces, especially those under the subheading "Moods of My Own Mind." It is not simplicity or "low and mean expressions" per se, and not just baldness or humbleness of the subject matter, but Wordsworth's feelings about the "trifling subjects" and the poetic treatment which offended most of his readers. Deviation from some cultural and poetic norms, rather than self-aggrandizement by identifying with commonly accepted "authorities" or direct assertion of his individuality, accounts for Wordsworth's public image of eccentricity and egotism. A reviewer censures Wordsworth's "infatuation of self-conceit" and intreats him "to spend more time in his library and less in company with the 'moods of his own mind'" (A 1:314). In his review of Crabbe's *Poems* (1808), Jeffrey compares Wordsworth's egotistic indulgence unfavourably with Crabbe's social realism. "Mr Wordsworth and his associates," Jeffrey claims, "introduce us to beings whose existence was not previously suspected by the acutest observers of nature; and excite an interest for them ... more by an eloquent and refined analysis of their own capricious feelings, than by any obvious or intelligible ground of sympathy in their situation" (Wain 55). The emphasis on Wordsworth's revelling in his own "moods," his "random" or "capricious" feelings in defiance of public

taste finally crystallized in William Hazlitt's portrait of Wordsworth as an audacious egotist in the 1810s. One "burden of the past" for the reception of *Poems* (1807) was Wordsworth's fame due to the success of the *Lyrical Ballads*. The poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* might not strike the contemporary readers as too experimental for the time, and yet the theory on poetry and the poet in the famous preface no doubt earned Wordsworth the public image of boldness and even self-conceit, which was reinforced by Wordsworth's rather unsociable temperament. Associated with Coleridge, and more indirectly with Southey, Wordsworth also suffered from the attacks on the so-called "Lake School" initiated by Jeffrey in the early 1800s partly out of political reasons. When *Poems* was published in 1807 and the readers found that the new pieces failed to fulfil their great expectations, little wonder most of them would put the blame on Wordsworth's "foolish theory" and thought that Wordsworth deliberately challenged the public taste. A reviewer wrote in the *Critical Review* that Wordsworth "is only one of a tribe who keep each other in countenance by mutual applause and flattery, and who having dubbed themselves by the name of poets, imagine they have a right to direct the taste of the nation, and thus, infinitely to their own satisfaction, abuse the good sense and weary out the patience of mankind with their fantastic mummeries" (A 1: 313). If Wordsworth

was just an unambitious "common song writer," not a poet whose ability had been proved and a self-assertive "Lake Poet" who had promised that "*Posterius graviore sono tibi Musa loquetur*," his critics would have been much less harsh. Since Wordsworth was seen as a self-appointed "improver or restorer of [English] poetry" (Reiman A 2: 436), his failures were unduly exaggerated and appeared to be all the more blatant.

There are some aspects of *Poems* (1807) which truly irritated Wordsworth's contemporary readers. It was certainly not a matter of "Augustan" prejudices against Romantic innovations, for even Coleridge, one of Wordsworth's most appreciatve contemporary readers, expresses his discontent in his discussion of "the prominent defects of [Wordsworth's] poems" in chapter 22 of *Biographia Literaria*. One major problem has to do with Wordsworth's sentiments which were perceived to be affectation, arrogance, odious complacency, or at least the lack of sympathy. Eighteenth-century traditions of sensibility, rather than neo-Classicism, are relevant here. Let us take "Fidelity," "Beggars," "Gipsies," and "Alice Fell" as examples. "Fidelity" is based on a true story, as Montgomery summarizes it, "on the fate of a traveller who perished on that wild mountain, and whose body was found three months afterwards, with his Dog alive and watching

beside his dead master" (Reiman A 1: 336). Scott recounts the same tale in his "Helvellyn." For Aikin, "here Mr. W. has certainly been fortunate in his subject; the incident is affecting, the scenery picturesque" (A 1: 17).[3] Yet Wordsworth's version struck Aikin for "the coldness and tameness of the sentiments." "On the unfortunate man, scarcely one expression of commiseration is bestowed," Aikin complains in her review (A 1: 17). Let me quote the first stanza of each version for comparison. Here are Scott's lines:

> I CLIMBED the dark brow of the mighty
> Hellvellyn,
> Lakes and mountains beneath me gleamed misty
> and wide;
> All was still save by fits, when the eagle was
> yelling,
> And starting around me the echoes replied.
> On the right, Striden-edge round the Redtarn
> was bending,
> And Catchedicam its left verge was defending,
> One huge nameless rock in the front was
> ascending,
> When I marked the sad spot where the wanderer
> had died. (Scott 38)

And Wordsworth's lines are as follows:

A barking sound the Shepherd hears,
A cry as of a Dog or Fox;
He halts, and searches with his eyes
Among the scatter'd rocks:
And now at distance can discern
A stirring in a brake of fern;
From which immediately leaps out
A Dog, and yelping runs about.
(*Poems of 1807* 10)

With respect to language, Wordsworth's and Scott's versions are of more or less the same level of simplicity. And generally speaking, it seems that Wordsworth has a better control of rhythm. In terms of the depiction of action, Wordsworth's is more dynamic, but Scott's is more sensational, or one may say "Gothic," with the description of the mist, the eagle's cry, echoes and the dangerous rock. With reference to narration, Wordsworth's is an "omniscient" point of view while Scott's is a first-person point of view. The greatest difference for their contemporary readers lies in the focus of attention and the poets' sentiments about the incident. For Wordsworth, the centre of interest is fidelity of the dog, hence the description of the dead man is kept to a minimum. Besides, the narrator's tone seems to be quite detached, without any overt expression of pity for the man. The last few lines offer a eulogy for the dog:

How nourish'd here through such long time
He knows, who gave that love sublime,
And gave that strength of feeling, great
Above all human estimate.
(*Poems of 1807* 12, lines 62-65)

To be fair to Wordsworth, one must note that Wordsworth's restraint was a reaction against sentimental "Magazine Poetry" and sensational German ballads of the day. However, for most of the contemporary readers, Wordsworth's version is simply too "prosaic" and cold, while Scott's version is colourful and pleasing. Scott follows an eighteenth-century convention of the lavish show of pity for the pathetic subject:

How long didst thou think that his silence was
slumber?
When the wind waved his garment, how oft didst
thou start?
How many long days and long weeks didst thou
number,
Ere he faded before thee, the friend of thy
heart?
And O, was it meet that -- no requiem read o'er
him,
No mother to weep and no friend to deplore him,
And thou, little guardian, alone stretched

before him--

Unhonored the Pilgrim from life should depart?

(Scott 38)

For some twentieth-century readers, Scott's lamentation may well appear to be "affectation" or excessive. For their contemporaries, however, Wordsworth's sensibility is "perverse." To Montgomery, "Fidelity" "proves that Mr. Wordsworth, when he pleases, can be as much inferior to another as to himself" (A 1: 336).

"Beggars" is also a poem based on a real incident. According to Dorothy's diary for 10 June 1800, one day,

> a very tall woman... called at the door... She led a little bare-footed child... by the hand and said her husband who was a tinker was gone before with the other children. I gave her a piece of Bread. Afterwards on my road to Ambleside... I saw her husband sitting by the roadside, his two asses feeding beside him and the two young children at play upon the gras... [Later] I saw too boys before me... They continued at play till I drew very near and then they addressed me with the Beggars' cant and the whining voice of sorrow. I said I served your mother this morning. (The Boys were so like the woman who had called at the door that I could not be mistaken.) O! says the

> elder you could not serve my mother for she's dead and my father's on the next town... I persisted in my assertion and that I would give them nothing. Says the elder, Come, let's away, and away they flew like lightning. (*Journals* 1:47)

But without the knowledge of what really happened, the readers would readily suspect the narrator's affectation or even moral hypocrisy as suggested by the lines below:

> In all my walks, through field or town,
> Such Figure had I never seen:
> Her face was of Egyptian brown:
> Fit person was she for a Queen,
> To head those ancient Amazonian files:
> Or ruling Bandit's Wife, among the Grecian Isles.
> Before me begging did she stand,
> Pouring out sorrows like a sea;
> Grief after grief:- on English Land
> Such woes I knew could never be;
> And yet a boon I gave her; for the Creature
> Was beautiful to see; a Weed of glorious feature! (*Poems of 1807* 37, lines 7-18)

When the evangelists were actively preaching almsgiving, when food riots were heard now and then, to question whether a beggar was a fraud and to claim that "on English Land/

Such woes... could never be" was hardly honourable for a "man of Taste." Even worse is the appeal to exoticism in exaggerating that "Fit person was she for a Queen" (line 10). By alluding to Egypt, to Greek bandits and the legendary Amazonians, the narrator has transformed the familiar person of pity into a seductive "Other" -- a bold poetic experiment offensive in its moral implications. The claim that "And yet a boon I gaver her; for the Creature/ Was beautiful to see" naturally appeared to Jeffrey and many other readers as "a very paragon of silliness and affectation" (A 2: 433). The conclusion of the poem would only further annoy the readers:

> Said I, "Not half an hour ago
> Your Mother has had alms of mine."
> "That cannot be," one answer'd, "She is dead."
> "Nay but I gave her pence, and she will buy you
> bread."
> "She had been dead, Sir, many a day."
> "Sweet Boys, you're telling me a lie;
> "It was your Mother, as I say - "
> And in the twinkling of an eye,
> "Come, come!" cried one; and, without more ado,
> Off to some other play they both together flew.
> (*Poems of 1807* 38, lines 33-42)

But even Dorothy was not absolutely sure that the boys were

children of the false beggar. Her only proof was that "the Boys were so like the woman who had called at the door that I could not be mistaken" and that "away they flew like lightning." To Crabb Robinson Wordsworth had written that the poem was to exhibit "the power of physical beauty and the charm of health and vision in childhood even in a state of the greatest moral depravity" (*Poems of 1807* 156). However, most of Wordsworth's contemporary readers would probably have mistaken that the "purpose" of the poem was to expose frauds and they would have been impressed by Wordsworth's apparent lack of genuine sympathy for the poor. "Gipsies" is similar to "Beggars" in sentiments and is an even more notorious example of Wordsworth's "bad" poetry. To many readers, it is "an odious and morally repugnant complacency on the speaker's part," as David Simpson puts it (27).[4] Let me quote the entire piece for easy reference:

> Yet are they here? - the same unbroken knot
> Of human Beings, in the self-same spot!
> Men, Women, Children, yea the frame
> Of the whole Spectacle the same!
> Only their fire seems bolder, yielding light:
> Now deep and red, the colouring of night;
> That on their Gipsy-faces falls,
> Their bed of straw and blanket-walls.
> -Twelve hours, twelve bounteous hours, are gone

while I
Have been a Traveller under open sky,
Much witnessing of change and chear,
Yet as I left I find them here!
The weary Sun betook himself to rest.
-Then issued Vesper from the fulgent West,
Outshining like a visible God
The glorious path in which he trod.
And now, ascending, after one dark hour,
And one night's diminution of her power,
Behold the mighty Moon! this way
She looks as if at them - but they
Regard not her:- oh better wrong and strife,
Better vain deeds or evil than such life!
The silent Heavens have goings on;
The stars have tasks - but these have none.
(*Poems of 1807* 94)

What might have offended Wordsworth's contemporary readers was certainly not "low and mean expressions." The expressions like "Bounteous hours" and "The weary Sun... issued Vesper from the fulgent West, /Outshining like a visible God" definitely do not belong to the language of the "low and rustic life." Simpson is right in saying that "by 1807, Wordsworth is ... already moving away from the commitment to simplicity of diction that characterizes the

majority of the *Lyrical Ballads*" (30). "Fulgent," which came from the Latin "*fulgere*" (shine) and "Vesper," or the evening star, again of Latin origin, are undoubtedly archaic. What actually troubled Wordsworth's readers was the narrator's condescending tone. As Coleridge writes in *Biographia Literaria*, "Gipsies" is an example of "*mental* bombast":

> Whereat the poet, without seeming to reflect that the poor tawny wanderers might probably have been tramping for weeks together through road and lane, over moor and mountain, and consequently must have been right glad to rest themselves, their children and cattle, for one whole day; and overlooking the obvious truth, that such repose might have been for *them*, as a walk of the same continuance was pleasing or healthful for the more fortunate poet; expresses his indignation in a series of lines... (259)

Wordsworth's scorn as expressed by the exclamation "oh better wrong and strife, /Better vain deeds or evil than such life!" had struck his readers, including Hazlitt, as utterly incongruous with the "poet of the human heart." In such poems as "Beggars" and "Gipsies," Wordsworth's more sincere sympathy for the underpriviledged and the pathetic as one finds in his earlier poems like "The Female Vagrant"

and "Michael" seems to have vanished. "Alice Fell" is a piece "of the same order" as "Beggars" and it had provoked Jeffrey into writing that: "If the printing of such trash as this be not felt as an insult on the public taste, we are afraid it cannot be insulted" (Reiman A 2: 433). "Alice Fall" is again a simple tale. The narrator on a postchaise hears a scream and finds a little girl crying because her worn-out cloak has been damaged by the wheel. Having taken the poor orphan girl to Durham with him, the narrator buys her a good cloak and she becomes a "proud creature... the next day." The reason for Jeffrey's indignation, I suppose, is not the "baldness" of the tale or the simplicity of language. Rather, it is the narrator's moral complacency as suggested by the last two stanzas:

> Up to the Tavern-door we post;
> Of Alice and her grief I told;
> And I gave money to the Host,
> To buy a new Cloak for the old.
> "And let it be of duffil grey,
> As warm a cloak as man can sell!"
> Proud Creature was she the next day,
> The little Orphan, Alice Fell!
> (*Poems of 1807* 41)

Apart from affectation and complacency, Wordsworth's *Poems* (1807) was also subject to the charge of childishness and

triviality. Like "The Idiot Boy" in the *Lyrical Ballads*, "The Blind Highland Boy" is a mock romance. In the former tale, Johnny the idiot boy is sent to call for a doctor for his neighbour, the sick Old Susan; but the boy apparently forgets his mission and disappears with his pony till, at last, he is discovered in the morning. Though Wordsworth plays with serious adventure stories by using an anti-hero and an anti-climax, the entire poem is infused with warm benevolent feelings. Johnny's mother sends his beloved child out even though she knows the danger, and Johnny cheerfully accepts the mission. And there is also the description of his mother's concern about Johnny when she is desperately looking for him. On "The Idiot Boy" Wordsworth had said that he "never wrote anything with so much glee." "The Blind Highland Boy," on the other hand, failed to delight most of Wordsworth's contemporary critics. The protagonist of this poem lives by a lake open to the sea and wishes to venture on the perilous sea, and his mother always warns him not to do so. But one day, when his mother is away, he gets on his vessel and hurries down to the sea:

> In such a vessel ne'er before
> Did human Creature leave the shore:
> If this or that way he should stir,
> Woe to the poor blind Mariner!
> For death will be his doom.

Strong is the current; but be mild,
Ye waves, and spare the helpless Child!
If ye in anger fret or chafe,
A Bee-hive would be ship as safe
  As that in which he sails.
But say, what was it? Thought of fear!
Well may ye tremble when ye hear!
-A Household Tub, like one of those
Which women use to wash their clothes,
  This carried the blind Boy.
(*Poems of 1807* 101, lines 101-15)

At last, the boy's mischief is discovered by people including his mother, and he is "saved." "His Mother dear,"

She who had fainted with her fear,
Rejoiced when waking she espies
The Child; when she can trust her eyes,
  And touches the blind Boy.
She led him home, and wept amain,
When he was in the house again:
Tears flow'd in torrents from her eyes,
She could not blame him, or chastise:
  She was too happy far.
(*Poems of 1807* 103, lines 192-200)

Although, as in "The Idiot Boy," there is the description of maternal love, it is overwhelmed by the playful tone and the

triviality of the incident. For Aikin, this is no more than "a pretty tale for children" (Reiman A 1: 18). Jeffrey was so irritated by the anti-climatic tub scene that he wrote: "This, it will be admitted, is carrying the matter as far as it will well go; nor is there anything, -- down to the wiping of shoes, or the evisceration of chickens, -- which may not be introduced in poetry, if this is tolerated" (A 2: 435). Lyrical pieces in *Poems* (1807) like "The Redbreast and the Butterfly," "To a Butterfly", and "Among all lovely things my Love had been" were all considered by Wordsworth's contemporary critics as "mock-verses," examples of "puerile conceit." A reviewer claimed that Wordsworth "imitate[s] the lisp of children" (A 1: 44). Obviously, without the success of the *Lyrical Ballads* and without the bold poetic theory he had announced, triviality and childishness would not have made Wordsworth's *Poems* so scandalous. No one would put the same blame on Charles and Mary Lamb for their poems intended for children. But, as a critic argues in the *Critical Review*:

> A SILLY book is a serious evil; but it becomes absolutely insupportable when written by a man of sense. A fool may scribble without giving any great offence to society: his "Daisies," "Cuckoos," "green Linnets," and "falling Leaves," are as innocent as the "lovely creatures" to which

> they are addressed; but we cannot see real talents and genius squandered away on uses "So weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable," as those which Mr. W. selects for the subjects of his muse, without sentiments too lively for indifference, and not quite gentle enough for mere compassion. (A 1: 313)

What really annoyed many contemporary critics of Wordsworth and convinced them of his "egotism" was not just triviality, not even unconventional associations, but the disproportion between the mean subject and the elevated style or profound or lofty thoughts. "All the world laughs at Elegiac stanzas to a sucking-pig -- a Hymn on Washing-day -- Sonnets to one's grandmother -- or Pindarics on gooseberry-pye; and yet, we are afraid, it will not be quite easy to convince Mr Wordsworth, that the same ridicule must infallibly attach to most of the pathetic pieces in these volumes," so Jeffrey contends in his review of *Poems*, and not without reason (A 2: 431). Likewise, in *Literaria Biographia* Coleridge discusses the problem of disharmony of style or incongruity of diction in some of Wordsworth's poems. Related to this is "an intensity of feeling disproportionate to such knowledge and value of the objects described as can be fairly anticipated of men in general, even of the most cultivated classes" (258). Another similar defect is what

Coleridge calls "mental bombast," "a disproportion of thought to the circumstance and occasion" (258). We shall take "To the Small Celandine" and "I wandered lonely as a Cloud" as examples. There is no simple rule to decide whether the common pilewort is "poetic" or not, or whether roses are more elevated than daffodils. It is a matter of convention and convention changes in the course of time. In so speaking, I am not suggesting that the poet is free to write whatever he or she likes; on the contrary, I am emphasizing the "burden of the past." Nightingale was "poetic" to the Romantics because the great poets before them, like Chaucer, Sidney and Milton had written about it. But what about "the small Celandine"? Certainly before Wordsworth it was mean for it had not been baptized by great poets and neither was it elevated in folk beliefs. To call it "Celandine" instead of "pilewort" did not instantly make it much more poetic. And to infuse the "little, humble Celandine" with almost Biblical significance, unless sanctioned by good reasons, was a breach of decorum. The impression of "To the Small Celandine" on the readers, whether contemporaries of Wordsworth or not, may be a self-conceited poet's eccentric insistence:

> Prophet of delight and mirth,
> Scorn'd and slighted upon earth!
> Herald of a mighty band,

> Of a joyous train ensuing,
> Singing at my heart's command,
> In the lanes my heart's command,
> I will sing, as doth behove,
> Hymns in praise of what I love!
> (*Poems of 1807* 17, lines 57-64)

Standing alone, the poem may be quite innocent: I just tell you what I love. Unfortunately, when the poet's arrogance, bigotry, and even heresy were in the air, one could imagine how devastating such pieces could be. Daffodils are not particularly mean, for Robert Herrick has already written a poem entitled "To Daffodils" a long time ago. Besides, as Geoffrey Hartman reminds us:

> the magazine poetry of the 1790's is full of compassionate subjects, rural themes, and personal reflections. Modest Christian sentiment was welcome, and to "suck Divinity" (or even metaphysics) from daffodils was too common a poetic indulgence to have rouse the contemptuous disgust of a literary lady. (***Wordsworth's Poetry*** 5)

If in "I wandered lonely as a Cloud," the description that the poet's heart "dances with the Daffodils" is not too "big" for the subject, then why would Anna Seward, "a not unromantic bluestocking," irritated by the poem, call

Wordsworth an "egotistic manufacturer of metaphysic importance upon trivial themes" (Hartman 4). Hartman's answer is that Wordsworth "constantly details the state of his mind" (5) and excessively involves us "in random, personal experience" (4). What Hartman fails to see is precisely that what is "random" or "personal" depends on the very notion of norm or decorum. No one will complain about the thoughts associated with daffodils in Herrick's "To Daffodils," for they fall under the conventional theme of "*sic transit gloria mundi*." Seward disliked "I wandered lonely as a Cloud" not because the emotions are simply "too big for the subject" but because she saw them as unnatural and pretentious. To "suck Divinity or even metaphysics" from ordinary objects or trivial incidents might be totally acceptable in Wordsworth's age, but only on the condition that such Divinity and metaphysics went with commonly accepted "authorities." And yet, with the ring of pantheism, mysticism and insolence in *Poems* (1807), Wordsworth's lyrical effusions often offended rather than enlightened his contemporary readers. Referring to "To the Daisy," a reviewer wrote that the humble flower in Wordsworth even "performs the functions of a Bible" (Reiman A 1: 41). The following lines was seen as "very cabalistic":

> When, smitten by the morning ray,

I see thee rise alert and gay,
Then, chearful Flower! my spirits play
  With kindred motion:
At dusk, I've seldom mark'd thee press
The ground, as if in thankfulness,
Without some feeling, more or less,
  Of true devotion.
(*Poems of 1807* 8, lines 57-64)

The last poem of the volumes, "Ode" (later subtitled "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood") was attacked for its "highly mysterious effusion, in which the doctrine of pre-existence is maintained" (Reiman A 1: 20). "Precarious" and "unmeaning" are two words one often find in contemporary reviews of *Poems* (1807). They do not imply that Wordsworth was particularly introspective or that he simply took "fugitive feelings seriously" in his poetry, as Hartman suggests. Instead, they tell us that Wordsworth's image in the early 1810s was an "egotist" defying the public taste and indulgent in some sentiments not (yet) shared by most of his readers. Of course, not all of the contemporary criticism of *Poems* (1807) is so well justified that we shall follow. For twentieth-century readers, perhaps most of the lyrical pieces in the collection no longer appear to be "babyish," "eccentric" or "sickly." Besides, after Marquis de Sade and

Baudelaire, Wordsworth appears to be only too decent. With respect to "I wandered lonely as a cloud" in particular, by 1970 Geoffrey Durrant can write that: "Few of Wordsworth's poems are so well known...; it is included in many anthologies, and has been learned by heart by generations of schoolchildren... [and its] cadences and phrases are almost as familiar as the Lord's Prayer" (124). Already in the Victorian Period, one of the greatest critics, Matthew Arnold, argued that "between 1798 and 1808, almost all [Wordsworth's] really first-rate work was produced" and that "his best work is in his shorter pieces" (298-99). For Arnold, pieces like the "Intimations" Ode no longer offended, for Wordsworth's "mysticism" was accepted as purely poetical "play of fancy." Besides, one must bear in mind that the vehement contemporary critique of Wordsworth's *Poems* (1807) was exacerbated by a more general attack on the so-called "Lake School" and was thus biased by political sentiments, as we shall shortly discuss.

II. Francis Jeffrey and the War Against the "Lake School"

During the 1790s, among the three "Lake Poets" only Southey suffered from hostile criticism motivated by politics. To be precise, the attack is not overt literary criticism but mockery of his poems. The metres and thoughts of Southey's poetry were ridiculed in four pieces of parody

in the *Anti-Jacobin* in November and December 1797.[5] Coleridge's early radicalism, on the other hand, did not hinder the recognition of his poetic reputation, as we have seen in chapter 4. As for Wordsworth, though he saw himself as a member of "that odious class of men called democrats," he was completely unknown to his public as a radical. Nor did his earlier published works before the *Lyrical Ballads* gain him much fame. The *Lyrical Ballads* was not a great commercial success, but it did help establish Wordsworth as a promising poet. The expanded preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), however, seemed to have impressed the public more than the poems. The boldest thing in the preface is not the emphasis on sensibility, which is an eighteenth-century heritage, but the claim that language of the "low and rustic life" is more philosophic and enduring than "poetic diction." A bold theory by a relatively obscure young poet whose "experiments" were warmly received was not particularly scandalous. But the association of the adovation of the language of the lower ranks with the notorious radicals Coleridge and Southey was alarming for some political-minded critics in the 1800s. Coleridge's poetry was so well acknowledged that, by itself, it was not unwelcome. Like Charles Fox, Francis Jeffrey saw Coleridge's "Love" as an excellent performance. Southey, however, had a reputation of self-conceit because when he

published his epic *Joan of Arc* in 1796, he boasted that he finished 12 books in six weeks. In a letter to William Matthews, Wordsworth says that Southey "is certainly a coxcomb," and that his preface to *Joan of Arc* "is indeed a very conceited performance" (Madden 40). Although *Joan of Arc* was still favourably received and *Poems* (1797, 1799) sold resonably well, Southey's *Thalaba* (1801) was a disaster. It was attacked by both the Tory *British Critic* and the Whig *Edingburgh Review*, and it did not sell. The unsigned reviewer of *British Critic* wrote:

> The process of writing himself down is here fully performed by Mr. Southey, if it be allowed that he had ever written himself up. A more complete monument of vile and depraved taste no man ever raised. (Madden 63)

In 1802, Jeffrey, one of the most authorative critics in the Romantic Period, reviewed Southey's *Thalaba* (1801) in the first issue of the Whig *Edinburgh Review*, one of the most respected journal in the Romantic Period.[6] And it inaugurated the attack on the so-called "Lake School" which was carried on well into the late 1810s. To group Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey together as a "sect of poets" is no doubt a mistake, as far as the great differences in their poetry are concerned. As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, Wordsworth's

experiments in the *Lyrical Ballads* were akin to eighteenth-century genteel antiquarianism rather than to what Jeffrey called "vulgar ballads and plebeian nurseries." Southey married Coleridge's wife's sister and had collaborated with Coleridge in writing *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794), but between 1795 and 1802, Southey was writing poems in lines entirely independent of Coleridge and Wordsworth. His negative comments on the *Lyrical Ballads* tell us that his literary taste differed from Wordsworth and Coleridge's. He had a Spanish and Portuguese learning which Coleridge and Wordsworth did not share; and he was reputed to be a bibliophile rather than a lover of nature. Apart from the epic *Joan of Arc*, radical in political sentiments, he also wrote ballads and eclogues. Unlike Wordsworth and Coleridge, Southey did not have an aversion to "Magazine-Poetry"; nor did he wish to replace the sensational and the Gothic in fashionable German ballads with a "commitment to the everyday." In his "English Eclogues," Southey imitates German models. Unfortunately, as David Rannie remarks, "they are not very successful, for ... simplicity is pursued at the expense, sometimes, of dignity and beauty" (95). If Southey's muse is sometimes close to Bürger and Scott, Wordsworth's and Coleridge's spirit almost always seems to be closer to Milton and to the eighteenth-century genteel tradition of rural retreat. Of course, as far as ballads

are concerned, one could not always tell whether Wordsworth's are more sophisticated than Southey's. At any rate, Jeffrey's charge that the "Lake Poets" "distain to make use of the common poetical phraseology, or to ennoble their diction by a selection of fine or dignified expressions" does not apply to Coleridge, for "low and mean expressions" as contemporary critics sometimes found in Southey and Wordsworth seldom appear in Coleridge. In poetic forms, the "Ancient Mariner" is an imitation ballad reminiscent of Dr. Percy's *Reliques*, which, for Wordsworth, has "absolutely redeemed" English poetry. But in sentiments and imagery it is much more sophisticated than ordinary ballads, be it antiquarian or contemporary. Apparently, Jeffrey loved the *Lyrical Ballads* but he felt apprehensive about the daring preface at least partly because of its political implications. However, to censure Jeffrey as a "literary reactionary" and dismiss all his criticism as mere misunderstanding and prejudices, as most twentieth-century Romantic scholars have done, is an overreaction implying an utter disregard of the historical conditions under which Romantic poetry was received by its first readers. For Donald Reiman, "in no review does Jeffrey... demonstrate any real understanding of the new trends in poetry during the period" (A 2: 414). But David Rannie's view is perhaps much fairer:

> It is a mistake to... think of Jeffrey as stamping a clumsy and brutal heel on the fine flowers of romantic poetry. Jeffrey was an accomplished critic and a discriminating one; his dealings with Scott, Byron, and Keats make it quite evident that he could appraise them nearly as well as his most "superior" successors; his appreciation of the Elizabethans was as strong, if not as delicate and inward, as that of Charles Lamb. But he was essentially a critical pedagogue of the old-fashioned type; he seemed to be half-scolding his charge even when he commended them, and when he conceived it to be his duty to punish, he showed little mercy. With the instincts of the schoolmaster he combined those of the partisan and the journalist; he believed in the "reality" of classes and "schools" ... and he knew that only opinions served up hot and strong avail to sell a periodical. (316)

Although Jeffrey did not have a high opinion of Southey's poetry, he generally admired and was faimiliar with Coleridge's poetry. In a 1799 letter he wrote that he had been "enchanted with" the anonymous *Lyrical Ballads* and that in the "Ancient Mariner" "there is more true poetical horror and more new images than in all the German ballads and

tragedies, that have been holding our hair on end for these last three years." He correctly guessed that the "Ancient Mariner" was written by Coleridge, though he said he was "no infallible discoverer of styles" (Jackson 60). His attack on the "Lake School" was based on the mistake that Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey formed "a brotherhood of literary heretics and dissenters, partly of German and partly of Rousseauish origin; a sect which the *Edinburgh* was bound to suppress in the name of literary catholicity, orthodoxy, and apostolical succession," as Rannie puts it (316-17). "The qualities of style and imagery," Jeffrey said, "form but a small part of the characteristic by which a literary faction is to be distinguished." "The subject and object of their compositions, and the principles and opinions they are calculated to support, constitute a far more important criterion" (Reiman A 2: 419). Obviously, for nineteenth-century reviewers like Jeffrey, politics and poetics were entangled. Allow me to quote Jeffrey's characterization of "our new school of poetry" at some length for easy reference:

> A splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society, seems to be at the bottom of all their serious and peculiar sentiments. Instead of contemplating the wonders and pleasures which civilization has created for mankind, they

are perpetually brooding over the disorders by which its progress has been attended. The are filled with horror and compassion at the fight of poor men spending their blood in the quarrels of princes, and brutifying their sublime capabilities in the drudgery of unremitting labour. For all sorts of vice in lower orders of society, they have the same virtuous horror, and the same tender compassion. While the existence of these offences overpowers them with grief and confusion, they never permit themselves to feel the smallest indignation or dislike towards the offenders. The present vicious constitution of society alone is responsible for all these enormities; the poor sinners are but the helpless victims or instruments of its disorders, and could not possibly have avoided the errors into which they have been betrayed. Though they can bear with crimes, therefore, they cannot reconcile themselves to punishments; and have an unconquerable antipathy to prisons, gibbets, and houses of correction, as engines of oppression, and instruments of atrocious injustice. While the plea of moral necessity is thus artfully brought forward to convert all the excesses of the poor

> into innocent misfortunes, no sort of indulgence is shown to the offences of the powerful and rich. Their oppressions, and seductions, and debaucheries, are the theme of many an angry verse; and the indignation and abhorrence of the readers is relentlessly conjured up against those perturbators of society and scourges of mankind. (A 2: 419)

Wordsworth's radicalism as reflected by the unpublished *Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff* and "A Night on the Salisbury Plain" was never known to his contemporary public. When the *Lyrical Ballads* was published anonymously in 1798, no reviewer suspected subversiveness in the volume. But in 1801, regardless of a general critical acceptance, the second edition was attacked by a reviewer of the *Monthly Mirror* out of a paranoia about "Jacobinism." "We regret," the short notice reads, "that these volumes are marked by a querulous monotony of woe, which we cannot applaud: for a wayward spirit of discontent has lately been let loose upon the world, and seems calculated to diffuse the seeds of general dissatisfaction, by libelling all mankind" (Reiman A 2: 687). A reason for the alarm was probably that the reviewer knew that Coleridge, the famous radical and heretic, was a collaborator of the book. Southey was also a radical during the early and mid-1790s. But after his

marriage and his trip to Lisbon in 1795, he had almost completely given up the dream of Pantisocracy. When the second edition of *Joan of Arc* appeared in 1798, he omitted some parts of it and added many historical notes in order to reduce the political favour of the poem. Gradually, Southey's orientalism and antiquarianism had replaced his "Jacobinism." However, in his anonymous poetic contributions to the *Morning Post* during the late 1790s, sometimes his tone was still very democratic, though many of his pieces praised retirement. In 1801, he even took up a temporary employment as private secretary to Issac Corry, Chancellor of the Irish Exchequer.[7] Coleridge, on the other hand, published anti-Pittite poems like *Fire, Famine, and Slaughter* (1798) and *The Devil's Thought* (1799) in the *Morning Post*. Apparently, Jeffrey's statement about "a splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society" was mainly based on his knowledge about Coleridge. An yet to claim, in 1802, that the poetry of the "Lake Poets" indicated that "for all sorts of vice and profligacy in the lower orders of society, they have the same virtuous horror, and the same tender compassion" was already anachronistic. Even in Wordsworth, whose pathetic poems like "The Female Vagrant" are closest to protest poetry, one already detects a shift towards passive acceptance of misery since "Peter Bell," which he began

writing in 1798. In terms of political implications of taste, the *Lyrical Ballads* was quite ambivalent. While some might associate the relative simplicity of language with vulgarity and Jacobinism, some refined readers, including Jeffrey himself, recognized its merit as a reaction against fashionable ballads of the day. Curiously, motivated by cultural and political biases, Jeffrey attacked the "Lake Poets" on two fronts. And however Jeffrey might be wrong about their poetic styles, he was not too much mistaken in regard to their political ambivalence. On the one hand, like some Tories Jeffrey denounced their supposed "levelling muse" for it might subvert the social hierarchy. On the other hand, as a Whig he blamed them for not being "angry" enough in politics, that they "never permit[ted] themselves to feel the smallest indignation or dislike towards the offenders." This was, of course, an overstatement at the moment of its utterance; but towards the late 1800s, the apostasy of the "Lake Poets" was to be clearly confirmed. Coleridge was an uneasy radical even in 1795, when he criticized the government as well as the atheist "English Jacobins." As a leader writer for the *Morning Post* during the period 1799-1802, Coleridge was against "the spirit of French ambition" as much as against the government. But in the course of the 1800s, Coleridge had turned more and more conservative. Later still, he was critical of the popular

demagogues and even of parliamentary reforms, and he supported the established church. Wordsworth's pamphlet on *The Convention of Cintra* (1809) convinced his contemporaries of his unwavered patriotism and of his hatred of the French cause. His earlier sonnets on liberty already indicated that he was a firm supporter of the English constitution. Since 1809, Southey had become a writer for the conservative *Quarterly Review*. Much of the severe criticism on the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, therefore, were complicated by political sentiments. With the appearance of Wordsworth's *Poems* (1807), Jeffrey found an opportunity to assault Wordsworth for what he saw as puerility, affectation and triviality. More radical critics like Leigh Hunt joined Jeffrey in the onslaught. Many other critics who were neither political radicals nor "literary reactionaries" also joined in, for there was certainly something in *Poems* which offended the public taste, as we have seen.

The charge of "egotism" originated in the criticism of Wordsworth's *Poems* (1807). But as the notion of a "Lake School" had been popularized by Jeffrey, some critics including Jeffrey himself naturally indicted the charge on the "Lake School" as a whole. If we read Jeffrey's characterization of the "Lake School" in his 1802 review of Southey's *Thalaba* along side his 1808 remark that, unlike Crabbe, "Wordsworth and his associates introduce us to; and

excite an interest for them ... more by an eloquent and refined analysis of their own capricious feelings, than by any obvious or intelligible ground of sympathy in their situation" (Wain 55), we can see an interesting shift in emphasis. In the former, Jeffrey directly blamed the Lake Poets for foolishly idealizing the lower classes and for their lack of political action, namely, to protest against the oppressors. In the later case, with the scandalous public image of Wordsworth as an arrogant "recluse," Jeffrey turned from direct political criticism to the more effective depiction of the Lake Poets as "egotists." To accuse the "Lakers" of "egotism" had at least two political implications. First, it implied that, self-absorbed, they did not really understand public affairs, that whatever they said was no more than products of their mere fancies, "beings whose existence was not previously suspected by the acutest observers of nature." As a corollary, their general social discontent was groundless. Secondly, to see them as "egotists" was also to suggest that they did not really sympathize with the lower ranks, that their nominal symphathy with the poor was insincere, no more than self-serving pretensions, that they were merely eccentric poets indulging in their own "moods" or "precarious feelings" which bore no tangible relations with political reality. Furthermore, as the critique was closely related to the

notion of taste or decorum, in terms of "puerility," "affectation" and "absurdity," and many other critics agreed on these as characteristics of Wordsworth's *Poems* (1807), the attack on "egotism" in the "Lake School" did not appear to be motivated by naked partisan politics. The younger critics like Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt and Byron were more radical than Jeffrey, but their criticism of "egotism" or "bad taste" in the "Lake Poets" was in line with Jeffrey's. Byron, for example, in a 1814 letter to James Hogg sneered at "beastly vulgarity" of the "Lake Poets," and like Leigh Hunt he abhorred their supposed social withdrawal and censured that "they [knew] nothing of the world" (*Letters and Journals* 4: 85). In the next chapter, I shall focus on William Hazlitt's love-hate relations with the "Lake Poets" and explain how the notions of "egotism" and of "Jacobin poetry" have come to be transformed in twentieth-century Romantic scholarship.

CHAPTER SIX

Egotism Transformed: Hazlitt's Criticism, the Acceptance of Wordsworth, and Twentieth-Century Romantic Scholarship

I. Egotism, "Jacobin Poetry," and the Love-Hate Relations between Hazlitt and the "Lake Poets"

Son of a Dissenting Minister, William Hazlitt was a Bonapartist radical and a famous critic in the Romantic Period. Keats once wrote to the painter B.R. Haydon that he was "convinced that there [were] three things to rejoice at in this Age -- The Excursion[,] Your Pictures, and Hazlitt's depth of Taste" (*Letters* 1: 203). As a young man, Hazlitt himself idolized Coleridge and admired the poetry of the "Lake Poets." When Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey all turned conservatives in the course of the 1800s, Hazlitt's estrangement from them was just a matter of time. But apart from the divergence in political sympathy, personal relationship complicated the whole thing. In 1803 Hazlitt left the Lake District probably due to embarrassment or shame. It was rumoured that he had sexually assaulted a local girl and was helped by the Wordsworth's circle to escape, but there is simply no solid evidence for supporting or dismissing the story. According to Stanley Jones:

> In March 1804, just four months [after the episode], we find Wordsworth still writing to Hazlitt in the most relaxed and friendly terms... Clearly something occurred between 1804 and 1814, and probably before 1808, to change Wordsworth's attitude to Hazlitt, but what it was remains obscure. (158-59)

In 1814 Southey claimed that he helped Hazlitt "escape from Cumberland." "What is clear," Stephen Gill tells us, "is that by 1814 all the Wordsworth circle believed that Hazlitt had behaved disgracefully in some sexual way and that what ought to have been gratitude had turned to spite" (304). When Wordsworth's *The Excursion* was published in 1814, Hazlitt reviewed it immediately in Leigh Hunt's *Examiner*. It was reported that Wordsworth was pleased by the review, but when he found out that it was written by Hazlitt he became irritated. Hazlitt's review is not unsympathetic; but influenced by critics of Wordsworth's *Poems* (1807), he highlights Wordsworth's "egotism." For Hazlitt, Wordsworth's mind,

> is the reverse of dramatic. It resists all change of character, all variety of scenery, all the bustle, machinery, and pantomime of the stage, or of real life, -- whatever might relieve or relax or change the direction of its own activity,

> jealous of all competition. The power of his mind preys upon itself. It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe. He lives in the busy solitude of his own heart; in the deep silence of thought. His imagination lends life and feeling only to "the bare trees and mountains bare," peoples the viewless tracts of air, and converses with the silent clouds! (Reiman A 2: 523)

With all his reservations and criticism, Hazlitt remained a lover of Wordsworth's poetry, however he abhorred Wordsworth's politics and Wordsworth himself. Coleridge, on the other hand, was seen as a "lost leader." In his 1818 lecture on the "living poets," Hazlitt brought back his youthful memories:

> [Coleridge] is the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius. He is the only person from whom I ever learnt anything... He was the first poet I ever knew. His genius at that time had angelic wings, and fed on mania. He talked on for ever; and you wished him to talk on for ever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort; but as if borne on the gust of genius, and as if the wings of imagination lifted him from off his feet...

> His mind was clothed with wings; and raised on them, he lifted philosophy to heaven. In his descriptions, you then saw the progress of human happiness and liberty in bright and never-ending succession, like the steps of Jacob's ladder, with airy shapes ascending and descending, and with the voice of God at the top of the ladder. And shall I, who heard him, who heard him then, listen to him now? Not I!... That spell is broke; that time is gone for ever; that voice is heard no more: but still the recollection comes rushing by with thoughts of long-past years, and rings in my ears with never-dying sound. (5: 167)

Hazlitt's deep fascination by the God-like radical Coleridge and his great disappointment about his young idol's apostasy are all revealed. His charge of "egotism" on the "Lake Poets" and his exaggeration of their early poetry as "Jacobin poetry" must be understood in this light. After the review of *The Excursion,* in his 1818 lecture on Shakespeare and Milton, Hazlitt again discusses "egotism" in the "Lake School," certainly having Wordsworth in mind:

> The great fault of a modern school of poetry is, that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility; or what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendour

> and human passion, to surround the meanest objects with the morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers' own minds. Milton and Shakespeare did not so understand poetry. They gave a more liberal interpretation both to nature and art. They did not do all they could to get rid of the one and the other, to fill up the dreary void with the Moods of their own Minds. They owe their power over the human mind to their having had a deeper sense than others of what was grand in the objects of nature, or affecting in the events of human life. But to the men I speak of there is nothing interesting, nothing heroical, but themselves. To them the fall of gods or of great men is the same... for their minds reject, with a convulsive effort and intolerable loathing, the very idea that there ever was, or was thought to be, any thing superior to themselves. All that has ever excited the attention or admiration of the world, they look upon with the most perfect indifference; and they are surprised to find that the world repays their indifference with scorn. (Hazlitt 5: 53)

Keats attended most of Hazlitt's 1818 lectures on English poetry, including the one from which the above sentences are

quoted. Keats' initial feelings about Wordsworth were mixed. In a letter to George and Tom Keats, dated February 1818, he confesses: "I am sorry that Wordsworth has left a bad impression wherever he visited in Town -- by his egotism, Vanity and bigotry -- yet he is a great Poet if not a Philosopher" (*Letters* 1: 237). Later, in his famous letter to Richard Woodhouse, dated October 1818, Keats develops his theory of "negative capability" as a reaction against "the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; ... a. thing per se [which] stands alone": "A Poet... has no Identity -- he is continually in for -- and filling some other Body -- The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute -- the poet has none; no identity..." (1: 387). After Hazlitt and Keats, Wordsworth's "egotism" or "egotistical sublime" has become well-known down to our days.[1]

One must not follow Keats and see Wordsworth's or other "Lakers'" egotism simply as an innocent matter of poetic identity. The label "egotism," as we have seen in Jeffrey, was related to a politics of taste. For the younger radicals like Hazlitt, Hunt and Shelley, the claim that "Lake Poets" were "egotists" implied that they were so much obsessed with themselves that they no longer cared about society. Indeed, the truth is just the opposite: although

Wordsworth did not, after the 1807 failure, publish his poetry until 1814, since the late 1800s Wordsworth had become more actively involved in politics, as exemplified by his pamphlet *The Convention of Cintra*. Coleridge, as Hazlitt was well aware, had never stopped his journalistic writing since he returned from Malta in 1806. Besides, when in London he also gave public lectures. It seems that Hazlitt, an ardent admirer of Wordsworth and Coleridge in his youth and already estranged from them for political and personal reasons, was more willing to see them as "impotent solitaries," if not "ineffectual angels," rather than active apostates. Hazlitt's exaggeration of "egotism" in the "Lake Poets," particularly in Wordsworth, like his exaggeration of Coleridge's precariousness, betrayed bitter love-hate relations. Not a very long time before his 1808 lectures on English poetry, Hazlitt was still engaging himself in his critique of Coleridge and Southey's apostasy. He attacked Coleridge's *The Stateman's Manual* (1816) three times. While criticizing Coleridge's conservative politics, he drew the readers attention to Coleridge's earlier radical writings. Southey, in the *Quarterly Review* for October 1816, urged the government to take stringent measures to suppress dissent. Unexpectedly, in 1817, Southey's 1794 radical tragedy *Wat Tyler* was published against his will and to his great embarrassment. As a radical Hazlitt took this opportunity

to attack Southey in the *Examiner*, and Coleridge rushed to defend him in two articles in the *Courier*. And then, devastating to all "Lake Poets," Hazlitt surveyed Southey's publication history and argued that these poets were all Jacobins and that "their Jacobin principles indeed gave rise to their Jacobin poetry." Out of these political sentiments, later in the 1818 lectures and in *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), Hazlitt stressed radicalness in the young "Lake Poets" and overstated the influence of the French Revolution on their poetry. It should be mentioned in passing that the great divide between "Preromantic" and Romantic poetry and the emphasis on the impact of the French Revolution and related intellectual movements, as we take as shared "fact" after Visionary Romanticism, actually owes a great deal to Hazlitt's portrait of the "Lake School." More directly and emphatically than Jeffrey, Hazlitt talked about the "revolutionary [and] renegado extravagances" of the "Lake Poets" (5: 161). Wordsworth was taken as "the head [of] that which [had] been denominated the Lake School of poetry," which "had its origin in the French Revolution, or rather in those sentiments and opinions which produced that revolution" (5: 161). Oversimplifying the analogy between politics and poetics, Hazlitt claimed in his lecture on the "Living Poets" that, with the "Lake Poets," in the heat of radicalism "towards the close of the [eighteenth] century":

> Nothing that was established was to be tolerated. All the commonplace figures of poetry, tropes, allegories, personifications, with the whole heathen mythology, were instantly discarded; a classical allusion was considered as a piece of antiquated foppery; capital letters were no more allowed in print, than letters-patent of nobility were permitted in real life; kings and queens were dethroned from their rank and station in legitimate tragedy or epic poetry, as they were decapitated elsewhere; rhyme was looked upon as a relic of the feudal system, and regular metre was abolished along with regular government. (5: 161-62)

What Hazlitt said is patently wrong -- little more than a "Romantic" mystification of a certain golden age of English radicalism, which was short-lived and had declined by the mid-1790s because of the lack of extensive support. Hazlitt had evaded the treason trials, Priestley's exile, Wordsworth's inability or reluctance to publish anything subversive, and Coleridge's political ambivalence, among other things which really happened in the 1790s. About Wordsworth's experiments in the *Lyrical Ballads*, Hazlitt did say something right: "The Germans, who made heroes of robbers, and honest women of cast-off mistresses, had

already exhausted the extravagant and marvellous in sentiment and situation: our native writers adopted a wonderful simplicity of style and matter" (5: 162). But his characterization of the "levelling" muse in the *Lyrical Ballads* certainly went too far from Wordsworth and Coleridge's original intention:

> [Wordsworth and Coleridge] scorned "degrees, priority, and place, insisture, course, proportion, season, form, office, and custom in all line of order": -- the distinctions of birth, the vicissitudes of fortune, did not enter into their abstracted, lofty, and levelling calculation of human nature. He who was more than man, with them was none. They claimed kindred only with the commonest of the people: peasants, pedlars, and village barbers were their oracles and bosom friends. Their poetry, in the extreme to which it professedly tended, and was in effect carried, levels all distinctions of nature and society ... (5: 163)

With the eulogy of the spirit of "Jacobin poetry," Hazlitt overlooked Wordsworth and Coleridge's Miltonic aspirations and their reaction to "Magazine-Poetry" and fashionable ballads, which he did touch upon when mentioning "the extravagant and marvellous in sentiment and situation" in

German ballads. Besides, in politicizing the early "Lake Poets" and emphasizing the "levelling" muse, Hazlitt faced the problem of incongruity: how was he to reconcile the "levelling" principle with "the morbid feelings and devouring egotism" which he had indicted the same poets for? With reference to Rousseau, he suggested:

> [The Lake Poets] took the same method in their newfangled "metre ballad-mongering" scheme, which Rousseau did in his prose paradoxes -- of exciting attention by reversing the established standards of opinion and estimation in the world. They were for bringing poetry back to its primitive simplicity and state of nature, as he was for bringing society back to the savage state; so that the only thing remarkable left in the world by this change, would be the persons who had produced it. A thorough adept in this school of poetry and philanthropy is jealous of all excellence but his own. He does not even like to share his reputation with his subject; for he would have it all proceed from his own power and originality of mind. Such a one is slow to admire anything that is admirable; feels no interest in what is most interesting to others, no grandeur in anything grand, no beauty in anything beautiful. He

> tolerates only what he himself creates... He sees nothing but himself and the universe. (5:163)

But why should the subversion of established norms logically entail narcissism and "madness" of egotism? Hazlitt never came up with a satisfactory answer. The fact is, as we have seen, that the public image of the "Lakers" as "egotists" was primarily due to Jeffrey and others' criticism of Wordsworth's *Poems* (1807). When one turns to Wordsworth's earlier poetry or to Coleridge's and Southey's poetry, the charge of "egotism" becomes much more difficult to prove. In the 1818 lectures Hazlitt saw "egotism" in all of the "Lake Poets." But in his later book *Spirit of the Age*, Hazlitt no longer insisted that "egotism" was characteristic of Coleridge and Southey. Nor did he assert that theirs, as well, was a "levelling" muse. Coleridge was noted for he "sung his faith in the promise and in the word in his *Religious Musings* -- and lowering himself from that dizzy height, poised himself on Milton's wings... and wept over Bowles's Sonnets, and studied Cowper's blank verse, and betook himself to Thomson's Castle of Indolence..." (11: 33). The charge is not that he only concerned about himself and did not really sympathize with the lower ranks, but that he wasted his talents by inconstancy, precariousness, or an interest in too many things. "Mr. Coleridge talks of himself without being an egotist, for in him the individual

is always merged in the abstract and general," so Hazlitt wrote (11: 31). Southey, on the other hand, was remembered as "an enthusiast, a fanatic, a leveller" (11: 79) but "the most pleasing and striking of all [his] poems are not his triumphant taunts hurled against oppression, are not his glowing effusions to Liberty, but those in which, with a mild melancholy, he seems conscious of his own infirmities of temper, and to feel a wish to correct by thought and time the precocity and sharpness of his disposition" (11: 83). Although Hazlitt saw "egotism" as a "madness" or vice, he also said that Wordsworth was "the greatest, that is, the most original poet of the present day, only because he [was] the greatest egotist" (7: 44), that "his strength lies in his weakness; and perhaps we have no right to complain" (11: 94). "We might get rid of the cynic and the egotist," he added, "and find in his stead a commonplace man" (11: 94). In later ages, ambivalence towards egotism eventually gave way to affirmation, as we shall see.

II. Wordsworth's Rise to Fame

In the war against the "Lake School," Wordsworth suffered most. Rejected by the public, for about seven years after *Poems* (1807), he published no new volume of poems. In 1807, Southey published *Letters from England by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella* anonymously. Though the

readers soon found out his identity, the book was warmly received. The second edition appeared in 1808, and it was even translated into French and German. In 1809, he was invited to be the historian of the *Edinburgh Annual Register* and to write for the newly established *Quarterly Review*; in 1813 he was made Poet Laureate. His Tory turn thus also marked his career success. As for Coleridge, since the reissue of the third edition of his *Poems* in 1803, he had published nothing in book form for over ten years, and his "burden of the past" was so weighty that he had felt that his muse had left him as early as 1798. His "poet's block," however, had little to do with hostile criticism but a great deal to do with his self-intimidation. His exotic personality, his waywardness, his interest in metaphysics and drug addiction earned him notoriety. But with the public image as an interesting flawed genius, Coleridge also became a personality, admired even by the young radicals who share little of his political views. Among the "Lake Poets," Byron admired Coleridge most. Coleridge's *Christabel, Kubla Khan, the Pains of Sleep* (1816), thanks to Byron's recommendation, ran to three editions in a year. No doubt many readers were fascinated by the poems. But coming to a matter of literary criticism, most critics attacked it.. A critic of the *Antijacobin Review* said that "Christabel," what Byron called a "singularly wild and beautiful Poem,"

had "excited in [their] minds... nothing but astonishment and disgust [for they had] discovered in it, wildness enough to confound common-sense" (Reiman A 1: 23). "A more senseless, absurd, and stupid, composition," he added, "[had] scarcely, of late years, issued from the press" (A 1: 24). Another critic remarked wittily that: "if we consent to swallow an elf or fairy, we are soon expected not to strain at a witch; and if we open our throats to this imposition upon our goodnature, we must gulp down broomstick and all" (A 1: 239). Nor had the more radical critics paid Coleridge greater respect. After *Christabel*, Coleridge's later poetry was much less salable. But his image as a "wild and creative genius," though without enough constancy or emotional health to fully realize his large range of capabilities, remained a fascination. Keats and Shelley, for example, had each gone on pilgrimage to this "Sage of Highgate." Keats' "La Belle Dame sans Merci: A Ballad" was inspired by Coleridge.

Wordsworth's case was most dramatic. In his preface and supplementary essay to *Poems* (1815), he defies the notion of popularity and claims that "an original Genius of a high order" would create "the taste by which he is to be enjoyed" (*Wordsworth* 750). Obviously frustrated by his critics and the general public, he appeals instead to "the judgment of posterity" (755) in the bitterest tone. The

following lines from the "Essay" are perhaps the most notorious:

> Away, then, with the senseless iteration of the word, *popular*, applied to new works in poetry, as if there were not test of excellence in this first of the fine arts but that all men should run after its productions, as if urged by an appetite, or constrained by a spell! -- The qualities of writing best fitted for eager reception are either such as startle the world into attention by their audacity and extravagance; or they are chiefly of a superficial kind, lying upon the surfaces of manners; or arising out of a selection and arrangement of incidents, by which the mind is kept upon the stretch of curiosity, and the fancy amused without the trouble of thought. (*Wordsworth* 751)

But perhaps Wordsworth should have followed Crabbe Robinson's advice not to offer his public such "egotistical" effusions. Indeed in our hindsight, his indignation was not at all necessary, for the *Excursion* (1814) had already initiated the rehabilitation of Wordsworth's literary fame. Grand in design and conservative in moral sentiments, the *Excursion* demonstrated to Wordsworth's critics that he was not just a poet of the "moods of his own mind." As he had

promised in the motto prefixed to *Poems* (1807): "*Posterius graviore sono tibi Musa loquetur*" (Hereafter, at better opportunity, our muse shall speak to you in a more impressive tone). Since the publication of the *Excursion* Wordsworth had won some new admirers. Of course, his apostasy no doubt helped the critical reception. Although Jeffrey found the "lofty diction" of the Pedlar "absurd," and Hazlitt criticized Wordsworth's egotism, Wordsworth's unswerving friend Charles Lamb reviewed the work most favourably in the Tory *Quarterly Review*. Lamb apologized that "the causes which have prevented the poetry of Mr. Wordsworth from attaining its full share of popularity are to be found in the boldness and originality of his genius" (A 2: 831), not, that is to say, in his egotism or vulgarity. "There is," in the *Excursion*, "more of uniform elevation, a wider scope of subject, less of manner, and it contains none of those starts and imperfect shapings which in some of this author's smaller pieces offended the weak, and gave scandal to the perverse" (A 2: 831). In another Tory journal, the *British Critic*, a reviewer tried to convince the readers that, regardless of some "faults of composition," the sentiments expressed by the poem were truly Christian, not heretic. And a reviewer of the *British Review* defended Wordsworth's earlier poems, and, with respect to the *Excursion* he unreservedly claimed that:

> "The great, vulgar, and the small," will not understand it; and by consequence it will not please them. But the writer may watch with calmness and confidence the fluctuations of taste; and despise, without any emotion of anger, the sarcasms of petulant conceit, sitting in judgment on superior intellect. If the present age be not fitted to receive his poem with reverence and gratitude, that age assuredly will come. (A 1: 234)

As for collected *Poems* and *White Doe of Rylstone* published in the following year, critical views divided and the volumes had a modest sale, and yet never again did Wordsworth face the situation of almost unanimous scorn as in the case of *Poems, in Two Volumes*. In an essay on the "Lake School" in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, the writer, probably Wordsworth's younger admirer John Wilson, states that "the three great master-spirits of our day, in the poetical world, are Scott, Wordsworth, and Byron" (A 1: 78). By 1819, the label "the Lake Poets" no longer seemed to be a stigma and restricted to Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey. In an article in *Theatrical Inquisitor*, for example, a writer included Thomas Campbell, Crabbe and Montgomery in his list of the "Lake School." *Peter Bell* (1819) marked the beginning of Wordsworth's popularity. Since 1822,

Wordsworth's Miltonic aspiration began to be substantiated. In that year, he was visited by a famous Boston minister. Two years later, he was visited by the Bishop of New York. Other respected visitors in the 1820s included a law professor from Yale and a Professor of Sacred Literature at Harvard. In 1833, at the age of 65, Wordsworth was made the Poet Laureate. In 1840, Queen Adelaide went to Rydal Mount to pay him a visit. As a poet Wordsworth was never very successful economically, but firmly canonized in English literature, his fame is not below Milton in the twentieth century. According to G. Kim Blank's recent survey, Wordsworth is ranked 80% of the time at the top of the "Big Six" by teachers of Romanticism in universities in the USA, Canada and Great Britain.

III. Egotism Transformed: Changes in the Reception of Poetry and the Establishment of "Romanticism" in Twentieth-Century Scholarship

Why, then, did Wordsworth, a poet once notorious for his "egotism," eventually gain Miltonic success? There must have been some changes in cultural norms, and especially in the readers' understanding of poetry which allowed them to enjoy what was formerly perceived as offensive and sickly. The full answer is perhaps too complicated for me to articulate. But sensibility is certainly a key term for an

account of the gradual acceptance of Wordsworth's poetry since the mid-1810s. Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) remarks that:

> Year after year increased the number of Mr Wordsworth's admirers. They were found too not in the lower classes of the reading public, but chiefly among young men of strong sensibility and meditative minds; and their admiration (inflamed perhaps in some degree by opposition) was distinguished by its sensibility, I might almost say, by its religious fervour. (170)

In the 1820s, Rannie suggests,

> it was Byron's lasting vogue and the wide appeal of the sentimentalism borrowed from him by lesser versifiers, which was the chief bar to Wordsworth's popularity. Those who were leaving Byron behind did not turn to Wordsworth, but occupied themselves with "L.E.L." and Mrs. Hemans until Tennyson was ready for them. (325-26)

Writing in 1879, Matthew Arnold suggested that "Wordsworth has never, either before or since, so accepted and popular, so established in the minds of all who profess to care for poetry, as he was between the years 1830 and 1840s, and at Cambridge" (293). Coleridge's influence on some learned young men also favoured the reception of Wordsworth's

poetry. Besides, Rannie adds:

> The newer Liberalism was too young to think of Wordsworth as a lost leader; in so far as Liberalism means thought as opposed to habit, there was much in Wordsworth to nourish Liberalism, and, on the other hand, the higher Conservatism which arose in opposition to Liberalism, the Conservatism which idealized the past, and found a voice in The Christian Year and the Oxford Tracts, might, if it would, claim Wordsworth's direct support. (328)

Furthermore, educationists like Elizabeth Peabody began to consider using his poetry for pedagogical purposes. By 1831, his poems were not only read by sensitive and meditative young men, but being used in schools. It would be oversimplifying to say that the prize of Wordsworth's success was apostasy, turning from an ambivalent radical to an assured patriot and "traditional intellectual." His apostasy certainly helped, as we have seen with respect to the critical reception of *The Excursion*. More importantly, with the further secularization of culture, some readers no longer took his "mysticism" or "heresy" literally, as in the generations of Blake and of Jeffrey. Besides, with the further development of individualism in the senses of greater respect for "privacy," the more marked oppositions

between work and leisure, the public and the personal, and reason and emotion in the course of the Industrial Revolution, readers became more ready to accept eccentric sentiments, especially as it is harmless, as in the case of "my heart with pleasure fills, /And dances with the Daffodils." Wordsworth's emphasis that poetry speaks to the human heart and, ideally, it "widen[s] the sphere of human sensibility, for the delight, honour, and benefit of human nature" (*Wordsworth* 750) is primarily an eighteenth-century heritage, traceable to Shaftesbury and John Denis, and unrelated to German aestheticism. For educationists like Elizabeth Peabody or for Utilitarians like J.S. Mill, morality no longer had any necessary connection to religion and the sense of a split between intellect and emotion deepened. Mill is famous for using Wordsworth's poetry as a "medicine" for curing his depression. For Mill, the poetry of a "naturally poetic mind... is Feeling itself" (357). There was another line of argument since Coleridge which stressed the increasing mechanization or rationalization of modern society and the function of poetry or art in general to transcend sordid social reality. As a metaphysician, Coleridge also emphasized that Wordsworth was more a "philosophic" poet than a "lyric" poet. Following Coleridge, some "fervent Wordsworthians" in the Victorian Period, as Arnold puts it, would agree with Leslie Stephen

"that Wordsworth's poetry is precious because his philosophy is sound; that his 'ethical system is as distinctive and capable of systematical exposition as Bishop Butler's" (304). After Arnold and the Pre-Raphaelites, political and religious contents in poetry could be contained. Even the rebellious P.B. Shelley had come to be seen, in Arnold's words, as a "beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain" (351). Of course, Arnold was no aesthete. He never lost sight of the ethical value of Wordsworth's poetry and saw "criticism of life" as important to such poets as Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth. For Arnold as for the Augustans, poetry was the embodiment of cultural refinement, but for Arnold poetry is also a substitute for religion when he heard the "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" of the "Sea of Faith," and a cure for "Philistinism."

In the early twentieth century, the New Humanists like Irving Babbitt turned the "ineffectual angels" into pathetic egotists, "victim[s] of romantic melancholy ... incapable of action" (Babbitt 243). The prejudice against English Romanticism was much worsened by an undue confusion of English Romantics with the idealist and conservative German *Frühromanticker*, and perhaps more damagingly, with the French Bohemians and *fin-de-siècle* Decadents. Byron's *dandysme* might serve as a link between English Romanticism

and French Decadence. But one must note that Byron was not only an unreformed rake and a "self-exile," but was "Lord" Byron, a Whig peer who had given parliamentary speeches on social reform, and was also a volunteer who actively participated in the Greek War of Independence till his death. There is still a significant difference between second-generation English Romantics and the later *poètes maudits* who had lost hope or interest in social amelioration, and who would sever art from wider social and moral concerns. Much of Babbitt's criticism of Romanticism in *Rousseau and Romanticism* applies to Chateaubriand's and Musset's *ennui* or Baudelaire's showy anti-social sentiments, feelings which were not all that typical in Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Scott, Shelley, George Crabbe or Walter Landor. It is mainly since the rise of the "Visionary Romanticism" in twentieth-century criticism that the image of the English Romantic as a solipsist has been so firmly consolidated. In 1881 Arnold prophesied: "when the year 1900 is turned, and our nation comes to recount her poetic glories in the century which has just ended, the first names with her will be these[:]" Wordsworth, Byron, Coleridge, Keats and Shelley (330). In 1842, a reviewer of the *Athenaeum* already exalted Wordsworth's *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years* for his "infinite egotism."[2] In the twentieth century, as Wordsworth's fame has been firmly

established, for the "visionary" critics "egotism" is no longer an embarrassment, something which requires apology, but a positive and even desirable value. John Jones' 1954 study of the "history of Wordsworth's imagination" is entitled "The Egotistical Sublime," where the expression has already lost its derogatory meaning as intended by Keats. In Geoffrey Hartman's influential study *Wordsworth's Poetry* (1964), "egotism" is divorced from the connotation of the breach of decorum and becomes "solipsism." Jeffrey and Hazlitt's portrait of Wordsworth as an "egotist" is detached from its social context; "devouring egotism" is severed from the adjacent phrase "morbid feelings" and understood in a phenomenological and psychoanalytic perspective. What Hartman has overlooked is the historical fact that "egotism" precisely depends on the notion of morbidity or abnormality, that is, the perception of some "aliens" in contrast to "authorities," to borrow Greenblatt's terms. In Thomas Weiskel's *The Romantic Sublime* (1976) the "egotistical sublime" becomes a matter of "the structure and psychology of transcendence." In its eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century usage, however, "egotism" was based on the sense of defying cultural and poetic norms. The critical focus was on propriety or taste, with a keen sense of poetic and cultural traditions and pragmatic functions of poetry, rather than on some abstract notions of "solipsism,"

inwardness, "vision" or imagination "deep within" the poet. It is the visionary advocates of Romanticism who insist that selfhood is not only the "main haunt" of Romantic poetry but its very essence, and that inwardness necessarily implies narcissism and solipsism "destructive of the social self" (Bloom, "Internalization" 6).

Visionary critics follow Jeffrey and Hazlitt in seeing the Romantics, especially Wordsworth, as "egotists," and they further transform them into "solipsists." They also follow Hazlitt to insist on a great divide between eighteenth-century poetry and the "new school of poetry" headed by Wordsworth and Coleridge, and to emphasize that the "poetic revolution" was immensely influenced by the French Revolution and related intellectual currents. That Southey is excluded from the canon is not surprising, for his poetic fame has already sunk in the later half of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, despite its "thoroughly competent craftsman[ship]" Southey's work is not, as David Rannie puts it, "poetry of passion or prophecy" (113).

Many nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century critics still see Romanticism as a gradual movement initiated in the eighteenth century. René Wellek wavered between the conception of a Romanticism beginning in full force since the mid-eighteenth century and that of an entirely new age of Romanticism headed by Wordsworth. In

"The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History," one of the most important essays responsible for the establishment of Romanticism as a "period term" about a more or less homogeneous literary movement, Wellek refers to some critical opinions in the 1830s and 1840s and claims that:

> None of these publications uses the term "romantic," but in all of them we hear that there is a new age of poetry which has a new style inimical to that of Pope. The emphasis and selections of examples vary, but in combination they say that the German influence, the revival of the ballads and the Elizabethans, and the French Revolution were the decisive influences which brought about the change. Thomson, Burns, Cowper, Gray, Collins, and Chatterton are honoured as precursors, Percy and the Wartons as initiators. The trio, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, are recognized as the founders... Clearly, such books as those of Phelps and Beers merely carry out, in a systematic fashion, the suggestions made by the contemporaries and even the actual protagonists of the new age of poetry. (*Concepts* 156)

Unfortunately, Wellek has completely overlooked the fact that the two Americans, Phelps and Beers, like many critics before the 1940s, were no proponents of a 1789 or 1798

"breakthrough." Phelps treated the years 1700-1765, while Beers went down to the end of the century. When Lovejoy discussed English Romanticism in "On the Discrimination of Romanticism," he was still referring to eighteenth-century "naturalism... associated with primitivism," citing Joseph Wharton's poetry as an example. The over-emphasis on the impact of the French Revolution on Romantic poetry and the simplistic and anachronistic opposition between Romanticism and neo-Classicism, in fact, mainly came from Hazlitt and his followers' imprecise portrait of the "Lake School." It is curious that one pillar of the edifice of Visionary Romanticism rests on such a shaky ground.[3]

Through the notion of "egotism" I have tried to demonstrated that the discussion of selfhood need not imply an emphasis on uniqueness of the individual or on solipsism. The notions of privacy, decorum, taste, and authority may all be helpful. Beginning with a critique of Visionary Romanticism and qualification of Leftist interpretations of Romantic alienation, I have tried to historicize "burdens of the past" for the Romantic poets in terms of the poetic vocation and poetic traditions. And in light of these I have discussed the reception of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's early poetry and traced the formation of "egotism" in Romantic criticism.[4] I am not suggesting that my undertaking must be more historical than recent "New

Historicist" projects, but I hope my study will contribute to the much neglected study of the early history of reading formations with respect to Romantic poetry. In particular, I wish that my engagement with earlier readings will pave the way towards a better understanding of the nature and origin of "Romantic ideology." It is all too easy to fantasize oneself as a certain Romantic rebel and one's study as an "oppositional discourse." However, for a critic as much as for a poet, there is always the "burden of the past": "Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!" (*Wordsworth* 461).

NOTES

Preface

[1] The word "visionary" does not have precisely the same connotations to the Romantics themselves and to twentieth-century "visionary" critics. Coleridge once praised Brissot, the French Girondin leader executed in 1793, as "rather a sublime visionary" (1: 35) than a shrewd, Machiavellian politician. In critics like Frye, Bloom and Hartman, the sense of impracticability remains, but there is a new emphasis on individualism and aestheticism: the Romantics are seen as "visionaries" not only because they are idealists, but that their "visions" are "individual" visions transcending mundane politics, related to aesthetic contemplation rather than intended for social *praxis*. The title of Bloom's *The Visionary Company* (1961) and Hartman's later advocation of the "Revisionary Movement," the "better understanding and higher evaluation of Romantic writing" in *Criticism in the Wilderness* (1980) (44) paved the way for others to see their earlier work and similar scholarship from the 1940s to the early 1970s as a "visionary" movement. In *The Historicity of Romantic Discourse,* Clifford Siskin talks about the turn from "Visionary Language" to "Re-visionary Language," or from "Organic Romanticism" to "Ironic Romanticism."

[2] I am not claiming that most Romantic scholars are still cherishing these common views in "Visionary Romanticism." Far from it. But considering the lag of consensus and pedagogic practice behind "advanced" studies, it does seem that many still adhere to the "received wisdom" down to these days. "To most students," the editors of *Romanticism and Ideology* wrote, Romanticism is "a unitary shadowy phenomenon which can be extrapolated as forming a middle ground bounded by six poets: Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats and Shelley" (Punter et al 1). In the late 1980s, G. Kim Blank conducted a survey on the teaching of Shelley. In his questionnaires sent to "just over 100 randomly chosen universities in the USA, Canada and Great Britain" Blank did not even bother to define the term "Romanticism," nor did he seem to worry about objection to his limited list of "the other major Romantic poets": Wordsworth, Coleridge, Blake, Keats and Byron. See appendix to Blank, G. Kim, ed, *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth-Century Views* (1991), 242-47. For all the flamboyant gestures of undermining hierarchies, deconstructors like de Man have left the canon almost unchanged. Marxists and "New Historicists" have not greatly challenged the canon, though some of them turn to "minor" Romantics like John Clare. Marilyn Butler questioned the notion of "Romanticism" as a reaction against "neo-

Classicism," but her study *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (1981) does not seem to have any great influence. Feminists like Marlon Ross have turned away from the "Big Six," from what they see as "Masculine Romanticism," to women writers like Felicia Hemans and Mary Shelley. Still, the centrality of the "Great Six" in mainstream Romantic studies remains unchanged, and so does the general conception of a "Romantic revolt."

[3] Responding to Christensen, Levinson claims that the New Historicist does have a mission and a future: to "rewrite the past with the full complement of contemporary knowledges," "*send* the content of our criticism beyond its phase," and "*invite* the generations that succeed us to tread us down: totalize our phrases and violate our knowledge" (51-52). Yes, I would add an important qualification: "hungry generations" will seek us out and tread us down only if our works are useful to them, for contemporary criticism, as an institution, is an *agonistic* interpretive industry. To borrow Lyotard's characterization of the "postmodern condition" of knowledge production, "to speak is to fight, in the sense of playing, and speech acts fall within the domain of general agonistics" (10).

Chapter 1 A Portrait of the Romantic as a Solipsist

[1] One should note that Wordsworth himself did not publish *The Prelude* in his life because he "was clear that publication of such a nakedly personal poem could not be justified until the philosophical master-work to which it was a prelude were complete and published" (Gill 145). Having been indicted by hostile reviewers for "egotism" with respect to his *Poems* (1807), it is just natural that Wordsworth tried hard not to appear too "egotistical." As far as reception is concerned, one should note that his later rise in fame was in part due to *The Excursion* (1814), an effort to impress the readers that he was not just a poet of "moods" but could write grander "philosophic" poems.

[2] According to Wordsworth's I.F. note to the poem, the recluse in the poem is based on a real man who lived near the place he spent his schooldays. Besides, as Mary Jacobus reminds us: "the misanthrope is also a well-established figure in the eighteenth-century literature of sensibility," as one can find in Thomas Warton the younger's "The Suicide," in Fielding's *Tom Jones* and in Smollet's *Humphry Clinker*. In order to emphasize that Wordsworth's lyric is truly lyrical because it takes "fugitive feelings" seriously, Hartman evades all this historical and biographical information. But if lyricism is just a matter of precarious feelings, how could we explain that Charles

Lamb, saddened by his sister's murder of their mother, was so deeply moved by the poem that he asked for a copy of it?

[3] Dorothy wrote: "It was harvest time, and the fields were quietly -- might I be allowed to say pensively? -- enlivened by small companies of reapers. It is not uncommon in the more lonely parts of the Highlands to see a single person so employed." (Qtd in Wordsworth, *Poetical Works* 3: 444)

Chapter 2 Romantic Alienation Reconsidered

[1] Another possible influence, of course, is within Marxism itself. "Civil society," for the young Marx, is "the sphere of egoism," "a world of atomistic, antagonistic individuals," "isolated monad, withdrawn into himself" (15, 39, 24). But he is referring to general condition of alienation under capitalism, not having in mind poets or writers in particular.

[2] Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) sold 44,000 copies to 1830, including 11,000 in collected editions of Scott's poetry. *Marmion* (1808) sold 2,000 copies in the first month and 50,000 to 1836. *The Lady of the Lake* (1810) sold 20,300 in the first year, 50,000 to 1836. The first two cantos of Byron's *Childe Harold* (1812) sold 4,500 in less than six months. *The Corsair* (1814) sold 10,000 on the day of publication. Keble's *The Christian*

Year (1827) sold 379,000 to expiration of copyright in 1873. Pollok's *The Course of Time* (1827) sold 12,000 in some 18 months. See "Best-Sellers," appendix to Richard Altick's *The English Common Reader*, 386-87. In comparison, only 500 copies of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) were printed by Joseph Cottle. The two-volume second and third editions, published by Longman in 1800 and 1802, amounted to some 3,000 volumes, taken separately (Moorman, *Early Years*, 487). Coleridge's *Christabel, Kubla Khan, the Pains of Sleep* (1816), thanks to Byron's recommendation, ran to three editions in a year. According to Patricia Hodgart and Theodore Redpath, "Coleridge's early poems sold reasonably well, but his later poems did not sell well during his life time" (83). And according to J.W. Saunders: "[Wordsworth's] total earnings from print up to 1835 were not above 1,000. It took four years, for instance, to sell the 500 copies Longman printed of the collected edition of 1820. After 1835 returns were a little better... It was not until his last years that Wordsworth's poems became a profitable proposition in the trade" (170).

[3] Blake had a very limited readership in his life. Except *Poetical Sketches* (1783), Blake's poems were privately printed with his own illustrations. According to Hodgart and Redpath: "few people saw the comparatively small number of copies of these. Moreover, even those who did see

them seem to have generally paid more attention to the illustrations than to the text. Landor was a notable exception, on one occasion maintaining Blake to be the greatest of poets; and Hazlitt was also deeply struck by some of the poems Crabb Robinson read to him. Southey, Lamb, Coleridge, and Wordsworth all saw a few of the poems, and their interest was stirred more or less strongly, but in no case did enthusiasm lead them to recognize Blake's real stature as one of the great poets..." (14).

[4] Simpson adds the parameter of gender in his analysis of "Gipsies" in "Figuring Class, Sex, and Gender: What Is the Subject of Wordsworth's 'Gipsies'?" Note, however, in neither case does Simpson fully engage Wordsworth's contemporary readers' own understanding.

[5] See Rousseau's *Confessions*, especially the following lines in Book One: "Simply myself. I know my own heart and understand my fellow man. But I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will even venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may not be better, but at least I am different. Whether Nature did well or ill in breaking the mould in which she formed me, is a question which can only be resolved after the reading of my book." (17) Rousseau is no doubt a solipsist in his claim that his self-knowledge is the only genuine one. No other human beings, he is insisting, can truly know him. Besides, he is

"egotistical" for he stresses his individuality and he is exceedingly proud of it.

[6] The author is believed to be Richard Mant, who later became Bishop of Down and Connor.

Chapter 3 Burdens of the Past

[1] Admittedly, dramatists during the reigns of James I and Caroline could be famous and rich. By 1635, according to Saunders, "leading players commanded as much as £180 a year" (72). Shakespeare retired to Stratford-upon-Avon as an esquire with his own coat of arms. However, one must remember that these successful playwrights earned a comfortable living not just as writers but as players in public and private theatres and as shareholders of the company. It is only in the first half of the eighteenth century that a purely literary profession independent of aristocratic patronage was eventually firmly established and gained respectability. One of the most important socioeconomic development during the Augustan Age was the establishment of the literary profession made possible by the rise of journalism and the printed-book market. After the Civil Wars, J.W. Saunders remarks, "gradually but quite unmistakably... a genuine literary profession became possible" (93). Newspapers and periodicals had developed

out of wartime journals and prompted by the need for commercial and political news essential to the thriving long-distance trade. By 1720, the newspaper had already become "a national institution, any town of size having its own local journal" (96). The daily renowned *Spectator* (1711-12, 1714) reached a circulation over 3,000. Related to the rise of journalism were the increase of the number of booksellers and the growth of libraries. By 1775, there were already 200 booksellers in London and 150 in the provinces. By 1800, "every town of any size had its own circulating library, a small town like Southampton, for instance, having one with 7,000 volumes" (94). The emergence of middle-class readers in the later seventeenth century, its continual widening and technological developments in printing during the eighteenth century had changed the relation between the writers and the readers. The main system evolved during the Augustan Age was subscription patronage, whereby "the patron had been superseded by a kind of joint-stock body of collective patronage" (Stephen, 51). Later in the eighteenth century the mediation by publishers and book-sellers became more prominent. Before Milton, having one's work printed and sold was perhaps still a stigma disdained by some gentlemen. By the time of Addison and Pope, being a professional writer had undoubtedly become, at least in the eyes of some people,

an honourable career. Pope was "the first writer who made more money than his publishers" (Saunders, 137). Daniel Defoe, son of a butcher and once a secret agent for the Tories, was able to earn enough money and reputation as a novelist in his later years. Samuel Richardson, a London printer with no previous intellectual standing, was able to acquire an international fame thanks to his highly successful novels. The 1709 Act for the Encouragement of Learning offered the first legal definition of copyright and allowed the writers to bargain edition by edition with the publishers. Thenceforward, "works already published were under copyright cover for a further twenty-one years, and new works were covered, for the author or his assignee, for an initial period of fourteen years, renewable for a further fourteen if the author were still alive; various fines for infringement were imposed" (Saunder, 122). All these were undreamed of before the eighteenth century.

[2] On Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*, Jonathan Culler has made the keen observation:

> Poetry feels the burden the past more than poets, who, as Bloom must admit, are often unconscious of the role they are playing in poetry's family romance. Bloom's rhetoric individualizes and personifies, reducing poetry to a series of archetypal Poets, whom he must then admit are

different from the empirical individuals whose names they bear. (94)

[3] I am not suggesting that there was no recognition of generic difference before the mid-eighteenth century. Far from it. Aristotle attempted to distinguished among tragedy, comedy and epic. Poetry, or "poesy," on the other hand, has certainly been acknowledged long ago as an especially elevated mode of writing different from prose works. The point is, even in Pope, poetry embraces various ethical and even political concerns. *An Essay on Man*, written in verse form, is not "lyrical" or "imaginative" as readers of later ages would expect from poetry. That in 1880 Matthew Arnold criticized Dryden's and Pope's poetry as "the poetry of the builders of an age of prose and reason" and "not classics of our poetry" tells us how far the conception of literature, of poetry in particular, had changed from the early eighteenth century to the later half of the nineteenth century.

[4] The first English coffee house was opened in 1657. By 1708, there were already 3,000 of them in London alone. Originally, the Government was apprehensive about the "emergence" of such a "public sphere." According to Beljame:

> The Government were so fully conscious of this that they began to feel uneasy and the Danby

> Government would fain have suppressed these hot-beds of political opinion. But the Coffee Houses had already become so indispensable to Londoners that the outcry was violent and general, and Government had to abandon the project" (164).

There was, however, cohesive rather than subversive development in coffee-house society, for as Lewis Coser puts it:

> Coffeehouse society ... bred a new respect and tolerance for the ideas of others; it blunted the edge of diversity by cultivation of sociability and tolerance. Men who might have been despised and shunned in an earlier age because they proved eccentrically unwilling to bend to the standards of tradition were now heard with attention and respect and were greeted as potential contributors to a common pool of opinion... Steele's and Addison's successful attempts to create a new code of practical middle-class morality and a middle-class aesthetics through *The Tatler, The Spectator,* and *The Guardian* were anchored in coffeehouses. The editors of these papers drew many of their most brilliant pages from scenes they had observed in the coffeehouses or from conversations they had shared there. It was not

> for nothing that Addison spent six or seven hours at Button's every day." (21-22)

[5] E.P. Thomson is right in insisting that there was no middle-class self-consciousness in the earlier part of the eighteenth century. Although Augustan cultural élites like Addison and Steele did not see themselves as "bourgeois" writers, it is significant that most of their readers, like themselves, belonged to the aspiring middle class. Son of an attorney, Steele had been appointed to a number of offices, including Justice of the Peace and a Commissioner for the forfeited estates in Scotland, and was knighted in 1715. Son of the Dean of Lichfield, Addison had been secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and finally reached the post of secretary of state. Pope best demonstrated how literature, as the embodiment of higher culture, could be admired by the cultivated gentry and upper middle class across the boundaries of party and class. As a professional writer, as Leslie Stephen puts it, Pope,

> had become independent ... and moved on the most familiar terms with the great men of the age. The Tory leaders were, of course, his special friends; but in later days he became a friend of Frederick, Prince of Wales, and of the politicians who broke off from Walpole; while even with Walpole he was on terms of civility... (65)

[6] It is all too easy to blame the Romantics for their "evasion of history" without noticing the changes in generic expectations and the problem of readership. In the course of the second half of the eighteenth century, overt argumentation as one finds in Pope's *An Essay on Man* had certainly ceased to be a proper subject for poetry. In the days of Wordsworth and Coleridge, poetry was mainly lyrical or narrative, or both. The later Coleridge did not "talk politics" in his poetry at least partly because it had become more "unpoetical" to do so. Wordsworth, at his most socially engaged moment, preferred pamphleteering, for how could a Miltonic poet-prophet directly deal with mundane politics of the day in a work intended for "literary immortality"? Besides, a sympathetic reading public for the consumption of "angry" poetry of social protest was absent from the late 1790s to at least the early 1810s. Even in the late 1810s and early 1820s it was not easy for a poem like Shelley's *Peter Bell the Third* to get published in England.

[7] See Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, 208.

[8] "The term *Magazine-poetry* has usually been considered as synonymous with the most trivial and imperfect attempts at writing verse," so commented the *Monthly Magazine* in 1796 (qtd in Jacobus 184).

[9] For Coleridge's later comments on the preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, see his *Biographia Literaria* (1817), chapter 17.

[10] Etymologically, "taste" comes from "*taster*," Old French, derived in turn from "*tastare*," Italian, meaning "touch" or "feel." "Good taast" in the sense of good understanding is recorded from 1425 (Williams, *Key Words* 311). During the Augustan Period, it was often capitalized and associated with decorum, etiquette or discrimination. It had come to represent "the abstraction of a human faculty to a generalized polite attribute" (Williams 314). "Politeness," Paul Langford stresses, "conjures up some familiar features of Georgian society, its civilized if secular outlook, its faith in a measured code of manners, its attachment to elegance and stateliness, its oligarchical politics and aristocratic fashions" (1). For the aspiring bourgeoisie even before the Hanoverian accession, how to be a gentleman was already the most important theme of their cultural life. "In a sense politeness was a logical consequence of commerce," Langford explains in finer detail:

> A feudal society and an agrarian economy were associated with an elaborated code of honour designed to govern relations among the privileged few. Their inferiors could safely be left to languish in brutish ignorance under brutal laws.

But a society in which the most vigorous and growing element was a commercial middle class, involved both in production and consumption, required a more sophisticated means of regulating manners. Politeness conveyed upper-class gentility, enlightenment, and sociability to a much wider élite whose only qualification was money, but who were glad to spend it on acquiring the status of gentleman... Though it involved much emulation and admiration of aristocrats, it did not imply an essentially aristocratic society. Britain in the eighteenth century was a plutocracy if it was anything, and even as a plutocracy one in which power was widely diffused, constantly contested, and ever adjusting to new incursions of wealth, often modest wealth. (4-5)

To borrow the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's term, the rising middle class imitated their cultural superiors in order to gain social distinction or "cultural capital," and to legitimize their new hegemony. To be precise, the bourgeoisie did not simply "ape" the gentry; rather, they accepted while "negotiating," as emphasized by Habermas. But what has been missed in Habermas' and Eagleton's account is the tension not between the Tory and the Whig, but within the bourgeoisie itself, between the middle-class élites like Pope and Addison and the more "vulgar" lower-middle and lower classes with respect to taste.

[11] With respect to gardening in particular, Augustan

"neo-Classicists" even reacted against the "Classical" French style as represented by André Le Nôtre, against the excessive marks of the scissors upon every plant and bush, or in short, nature disciplined. If in the garden of Versaille "everything contrived to delude *Le Roi Soleil* and his Court into feeling that they were the center of the universe, from which a well-ordered life radiated" (Malins, 5), the English garden, with its ruins, hermitage, Gothic building or Chinese landscape, certainly reflected a much more liberal mind, "a love of reasoned freedom" (Malins, vii). Addison preferred the more natural landscape and claimed that in his own garden there were flowers of 10,000 different colours planted irregularly. For Pope, all gardening is landscape painting. The vogue of the picturesque flourished down to Wordsworth and Coleridge's days, and, one could say, demonstrated "a Lockeian contract between Art and Nature in which each mutually respected the other" (Malins, vii).

[12] Murray Roston claims that "almost every periphrasis used by Pope can be traced back to the *Gradus* itself" (31).

[13] In "Of the Standard of Taste" (1742), David Hume already admits that relativity of taste "seems to have attained the sanction of common sense" (230), though he wishes to argue that "it appears... that... amidst all the variety and caprice of taste, there are certain general

principles of approbation or blame, whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind" (233). In the essay "On Taste" (1757), Edmund Burke tries to counter the belief that taste is a matter of "caprice," "whims and fancies" (12) by appealing to supposed universality of sensibility.

[14] Alan Liu has observed that Greenblatt's "deeply antithetical notion of 'self-fashioning'" is similar to Hartman's dialectic of the self in *Wordsworth's Poetry* ("Review" 180). On Hartman's dialectic Liu claims that it is a version of "a Paulinized Hegel" (*Wordsworth and the Sense of History*, 514). And on Hegel Liu says that "in this field of idealism, dialectic cannot but privilege the mastery of pure mind over objectivity" (515). On Greenblatt Liu suggests that "the New Historicism in Renaissance studies is more Romantic than Romanticism itself" ("Review," 181). "Only a field other than that of Romanticism," Liu goes on, "could use the word 'dialectic' as innocently as Renaissance New Historicism..." (181). I am not at all sure whether my borrowing of Greenblatt is "innocent" or not. In my understanding, there are at least two significant points which distinguish Greenblatt's dialectic from Hartman's. One is the keen awareness of linguistic mediation: "Self-fashioning is always, though not exclusively, in language" (9). The other is the statement that: "Self-fashioning

always involves some experience of threat, some effacement or undermining, some loss of self" (9), which seems to be indebted to deconstructive criticism. In any case, I have not tried to be faithful to Greenblatt, and I definitely do not wish to "privilege the mastery of pure mind over objectivity."

[15] See Walter Jackson Bate's biography *Samuel Johnson*, especially chapter 9 on his early career, chapter 14 for his "Entrance into Middle Age; Uncertainties; Problems in the Marriage," and chapter 21, entitled "Approaching Breakdown; Religious Struggles; Fear of Insanity."

Chapter 4 Wordsworth's and Coleridge's Early Poetry

[1] See note 2, chapter 2 for estimated sale figures.

[2] The negative comments might have something to do with Southey's uneasy relation with Coleridge. Once they were very close, but Coleridge broke with Southey in late 1795. Their reconciliation in 1796 was not a complete one. In the late 1790s Southey seemed to be jealous of Coleridge's intimacy with Wordsworth.

Chapter 5 Egotism Established

[1] Here I follow Gill's argument in his biography of Wordsworth: "In 1805, as he concluded the great poem on the development of his own mind, Wordsworth was certain that his destiny had always been that he should become a major poet" (84).

[2] According to Alun R. Jones, "the Advertisement by Wordsworth was set up in proof but deleted by the poet from the published text of Poems, in Two Volumes" (*Poems of 1807* 145).

[3] The word "picturesque" betrays the immense influence of the eighteenth-century interest in landscape painting on the Romantic generations. The picturesque or painterly qualities implies the perception of nature through conventions of landscape painting. Admiring the topographical or landscape paintings by such painters as Claude Lorrain, Nicolas Poussin, Salvatore Rosa and Gaspard Dughet, Englishmen on the Grand Tour had brought home some 80 Claudes and 100 Rosas and more than 300 Dughet landscape paintings by the early nineteenth century. For Gilpin, the picturesque implies irregularity, variety and contrast. For both Edmund Burke and Gilpin, picturesque qualities are inherent in objects rather than in the observer. John Constable (1776-1837) and Joseph Turner (1775-1851) are two famous English landscape painters.

[4] I have already discussed Simpson's sophisticated readings of "Gipsies" in chapter 1.

[5] See Lionel Madden ed, *Robert Southey: The Critical Heritage* 55-60.

[6] Stanley Jones argues that the *Edinburgh Review* "was the only British journal of European stature, as is apparent from its momentous impact on Stendhal" (163). According to Donald Reiman: "The *Edinburgh Review* owed its initial success to the fact that it appeared at the right time, with the right format and schedule -- giving its writers space and time to explore issues in depth. It had also the right political and social bias to appeal to a large class of Whig gentlemen and professional and commercial men who had enough time to read and intellectual curiosity to appreciate the twenty- to fifty-page disquisitions on history, theology, political economy, or literature, without having the time or inclination to master all the fields themselves from the original books." (A 2: 413)

[7] See Carnall, 43-56.

Chapter 6 Egotism Transformed

[1] I have not mentioned one important sense of "egotism" in Coleridge. By "the alcohol of egotism," he referred to the selfish ambition of the self-made, "sublime" and "commanding genius" of the "great bad men" as represented by

Milton's Satan or Napoleon. For all the senses of "egotism" in Coleridge, one may consult Stephen Bygrave's *Coleridge and the Self*.

[2] See Steiner, 450.

[3] We have been using the term "Romanticism" rather carelessly. The canonization of the "Big Six" does not necessarily mean that they need to be seen as a more or less homogeneous school. Indeed, early twentieth-century critics, for or against these poets, were often more discriminating than many later visionary critics. T.S. Eliot, though disapproving of Shelley's poetry in general, was able to see "The Triumph of Life" as a great poem. Of the "Big Six," he could at least admit that: "Keats seems to me also a great poet." "Keats' egotism," Eliot apologized, "is that of youth which time would have redeemed" (100). Having called Byron "the great *vulgarisateur*," F.R. Leavis could still name Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats as "three great individuals" (14-15). In the first half of the twentieth century, the general academic climate, especially in America, was hostile to Romanticism. According to Jacques Barzun: "In those two decades before the second world war... the early, or Romantic part of ... [the nineteenth] century was held in particular detestation and contempt; it was naive, silly, wrongheaded stupidly passionate, criminally hopeful, and intolerably rhetorical"

(ix). But after the Second World War, the wind definitely changed. After the revival of Blake studies since the 1920s, already initiated by the Pre-Raphaelites and by Yeats in the nineteenth century, especially after Frye's early study *Fearful Symmetry* (1947) and Wellek's influential article "The Concept of Romanticism in Literary History" (1949), there came a whole wave of Romantic studies: C.M. Bowra's *The Romantic Imagination* (1950), Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), Herbert Read's *The True Voice of Feeling* (1953), Harold Bloom's *The Visionary Company* (1961), Geoffrey Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry* (1964), to mention only a few. It is in this stage of Visionary Romanticism that Romanticism became a well-established field of theoretical inquiry. With respect to the developments in criticism in general, this period also corresponds to the rise of literary theory, already enhanced by progress in the studies of "history of ideas" and further stimulated by the import of European philosophies. One must note that "Romanticism" as an "ism" implying theoretical rigour is not the same thing as in its earlier usage. The critical focus concerning the discussion of Romanticism has, in fact, undergone considerable changes from nineteenth-century amateurism to the institutionalization of Romanticism as a field of study after the Second World War. First of all, there has been a shift from "Romantic" (as opposed to

"Classic") as a more or less vague, ahistorical term for a certain "spirit," temperament or style to a more professional jargon in literary history, a "period term," as Wellek calls it. Stendhal, for example, said in his *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823) that: "*Tous les grands écrivains ont été romantiques de leur temps*" [All the great writers were romantic in their day] (Furst 8). Walter Pater, writing in the 1880s, talked of Classical and Romantic as "two tendencies" or "two elements always recognisable," and that "in perfect art" the two are "united" or "absolutely balanced" (24-25). Hall Frye's *Romance and Tragedy* (1908) describes the Romantic as "any work of literature or any writer who is opposed to classicism... either by temperament or on principle" (34). In his *Leslie Stephen Lecture* (1923), H.J.C. Grierson even claims: "Classical and romantic -- these are the systole and diastole of the human heart in history" (52). With Lovejoy's monumental essay "On the Discrimination of Romanticism" (1924), however, there appeared an unprecedented theoretical sophistication and historical specificity. The importance of Wellek is that he is the first literary critic with enough knowledge and authority to take up Lovejoy's challenge and to define Romanticism as a technical period term and establish it as a legitimate field of vigorous inquiry. While T.S. Eliot could still, writing in a more relaxed style, say things

like "I do not know whether [*Hyperion*] is a great poem" (*The Use of Poetry* 100), the new generation of critics like Wellek, Northrop Frye and M.H. Abrams would have no taint of amateurism in their criticism, which so often verges on philosophy. This is not to say that there were no earlier theorists, I.A. Richards being one example, but that, during the mid-century, there had been a much wider appeal to theoretical sophistication, especially in the American context. The enormous interest in Romanticism as an "ism," rather than just a loose grouping of individual poets, one may contend, is indicative of a growing professionalism in literary criticism. It is no accident that so many theoretical works, such as W.K. Wimsatt and M.C. Beardsley's *The Intentional Fallacy* (1946), Cleanth Brook's *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), Wimsatt's *The Verbal Icon* (1954), Frye's celebrated *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), E.D. Hirsch's *Validity of Interpretation* (1967) and Georges Poulet's *The Phenomenology of Reading* (1969), appeared in the wake of the institutionalization of Romanticism as a field of critical inquiry. By 1963, Wellek could review the term "Romanticism" in full confidence: "a stabilization of opinion has been achieved... that progress has been made not only in defining the common features of Romanticism but in bringing out what is its peculiarity or even its essence and nature" ("Romanticism Reconsidered" 133).

[1] Given more time, I would have included Byron in my study. Among the "Big Six," only Wordsworth and Byron were very often seen by their contemporaries as "egotists." Byron certainly contributed immensely to the general image of the Romantic poet as an "egotist" because of his cynical, anti-social persona, his glamorous, "exhibitionist" individualism. Byron's "egotism" is not quite the same as Wordsworth's. Most obviously, Byron could exploit his egotistical sentiments to attract admiring readers, while Wordsworth's was a stigma which he had tried hard to erase. In a wider, European context, Stendhal was responsible for the popularity of the term "*égotisme*" owing to his *Souvenirs d'égotisme* published in 1832. "Egotism" may indeed serve as a theoretical link for the comparison of English Romanticism and French Decadence in terms of the relations between the poet and the public.

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